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DISCOURSES
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TENDING TO ILLUSTRATE

The influence of the DOCTRINES OF GRACE,
upon HOLINESS IN HEART AND LIFE.

BY

Mr JOHN SPENCE,
Minister of Orwall.

For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.
1 Cor. iv. 20.

*Now if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none
of his.* Rom. viii. 9.

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THE following Sermons are designed to lead persons to a close examination of the heart, and its various workings, for the conviction of hypocrites, for the awakening of sinners, for the encouragement and comfort of true believers ; and also to recommend Christianity to the belief of all men, by bringing its truth to the test of their own consciences and feelings.

THE author of these discourses never intended them for the press ;

but several persons of character having heard them preached, to their edification, and one of them having obtained the manuscripts from the author, with power to dispose of them as should be judged proper, was pleased to order this publication, from a persuasion, that sermons founded entirely on the gospel-plan, would, in their plain, natural dress, have a happy tendency to promote the great interests of Religion and Morality.

EDINBURGH,

Nov. 12. 1779.

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S E R M O N I.

An Ordination-Sermon.

JEREMIAH, xxiii. 22.

But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

IN gathering a church, and training men for the kingdom of heaven, God hath uniformly employed, in every age of the world, the ministry of particular persons, duly qualified, and set apart for that purpose. The wisdom and propriety of this institution are so apparent to the common reason of mankind, that the nations have, in their practice, universally conformed to it.

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At first, as it was necessary, God communicated his mind *immediately* to certain individuals, commanding them at the same time to publish it to others in his name. The revelation to those chosen heralds came upon their own minds in such a godlike manner, as fully satisfied them, upon cool examination, that it proceeded from the one supreme God; and their publication of it to others was accompanied with such authentic marks of his signet to their message, as made it evident to the senses, as well as to the reason and conscience, of the unprejudiced, that the instructions they delivered were not their own dreams, but the undoubted oracles of God. But though these oracles given by inspiration contained the only infallible standard of truth and duty, yet the authority of the ministry was not confined to the persons of the inspired men who published or committed them to writing; for, during the intermission of that inspiration which distinguished these extraordinary messengers, and after it had ceased altogether, the institution of public teachers was continued in the church, with authority from God, to minister, to illustrate, and enforce, his oracles already on record. He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and after them appointed pastors and teachers, to be continued in succession to the end of time, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

This

This institution being evidently divine, and of such importance to promote the kingdom of Christ, it is no wonder, that the malevolence of Satan in his instruments should be chiefly levelled against the ministers, the servants of the Most High God, appointed to shew unto men the way of salvation. The personal faults of individuals are commonly used as a plausible pretext to discredit the whole order, and with them to bring religion itself into contempt; and however unfair this reasoning is, yet, in the management of an artful enemy, it seldom fails of succeeding too well; especially when the general charge has the unhappy advantage of being supported by too many instances of clerical misconduct.

That unbelieving impious men should be teachers of faith and piety, is such a glaring absurdity as needs no labour to expose it. It is obvious to the common sense of mankind; it is seen, and despised, by the most profligate. They cannot suppress their indignation at his inconsistent infamous character, who dares to recommend religion and morals to others, while he himself practises the contrary. The man's hypocrisy they detest, tho' they love his vices, and by his contagious example are more and more confirmed in them.

An order of men set apart for dispensing the ordinances of grace, being the established means of maintaining and spreading divine truth, the conduct of those consecrated guides, as it always

hath had, so it ever must have, great influence upon the state of religion in the world. As they act their part well or ill, it goes well or ill with the church. When the truth of grace shines conspicuous in the soundness of their principles, and the purity of their lives, religion gains credit, and prospers; but if they are infected with error and vice, with pride, with ambition, with envy, and other selfish passions, the beauty of the church is sullied, its ministry blasted, and its fruitfulness destroyed. The teachers thus corrupted, the fatal contagion spreads among the people; as exemplified by the history of the Jews before us, of whom it is said, ver. 14. 15. "From the prophets of Jerusalem is
" profaneness gone forth into all the land." If men destitute of capacity and religion grasp at the ministry, only for "a piece of bread," and so run unfurnished and unsent; if, when they are entered into the sanctuary, instead of declaring faithfully the revealed truths of God, they insist rather upon a scheme repugnant to these, upon the concerted airy produce of their own, or of other mens fancy; they shall not profit the people at all, nor be instrumental in curing, but rather in fostering the corruptions of the world. But as the Spirit says in my text, "If they had stood in my
" counsel, and had caused my people to hear my
" words, then they should have turned them
" from their evil way, and from the evil of their
" doings."—— In other words: — Did those who
assume

assume the sacred character acquaint themselves with God, did they reverently consult him for knowing his mind, and faithfully deliver the truths inspired by the Holy Ghost, with a sincere intention to turn men from sin to God, then should they succeed in turning at least some of the people from their evil ways.

For unfolding the words more fully, it is proposed,

1. To shew, that the end of the ministry is to turn men from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.
2. To make some remarks upon the means to be employed for this purpose.
3. To illustrate the connection between the means and the end.
4. To subjoin a few inferences from the whole.

I. I am to shew, that the end of the ministry is to turn men from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. Some apprehend, that each of these phrases expresseth a meaning distinct from and exclusive of the other; that by the first is meant precisely the wrong way or bent of the heart; and by the other, an evil course of life: but without straining to find such a distinction in the words, we may be assured that nothing less can be intended by turning men from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings, than a thorough conversion of the whole man to God, consisting in a change of heart, attended with

with a correspondent change of practice as its native fruit and issue.

The scripture-account of man's heart, which accords to experience and observation, is, that it is blind and wicked, wholly alienated from God, and enmity against him. The arduous work of the ministry, in harmony with scripture, is, to alter this wrong temper of the hearts of men. He who came a light into the world, sent prophets and apostles, and all his ministers, "to open the blind eyes," to subdue the rebellious will, and to purify the affections, that they may rise upwards to God, in whom alone they can find rest. This is a capital doctrine of the word. That "we must have a *new* heart, and a *new* spirit." The complaint is, that men professing to return, do not turn with the whole heart, but feignedly; that they follow not God singly for himself, but selfishly, for some worldly interest. The prime design of the ministry then is, to change the corrupt heart of man; to turn it out of its natural evil course; and by doing so, to turn men from their evil course of life. Vain is the attempt to reform the life, to reduce it to a settled tenor of virtuous conduct, while the internal spring of the heart moves irregularly. This rectified, the conversation takes a correspondent turn. To direct the life to what the heart inclines, becomes an easy task. "The integrity of the upright shall guide him, and direct his ways. The high-way of such is to de-
" part

“part from evil.” Thus to take men off a sinful course of life, and, in order to it, by all the winning methods of persuasion to gain the heart to God, is the worthy object of the ministry.

A dispensation from work, is not mens privilege by the gospel. It calls us from evil works to those that are good. Although we are not justified by the works of the law, but by the righteousness of Christ, this supercedes not the necessity of our good works, but affords rather the most powerful incitement and encouragement to them.—God hath ordained us to good works.—He creates us in Christ Jesus unto good works.—He commands believers carefully to maintain good works; to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling; to occupy every one diligently in his vineyard: he who doth not these things “cannot stand in the judgement.” We must arise, and work for God, from new, divine principles. Both must go together, a new heart and a new active life.

The design of revelation never was to gratify mens inquisitive curiosity; nor only to furnish their minds and heads with sound notions, but to correct the heart, and regulate the life: Carefully indeed ought men to be instructed in the form of sound words: but should the head be ever so clearly enlightened with these; should men be ever so zealous for them; if they are not operative upon the heart, to produce in it faith that works by love, they

they are unavailing to salvation; and the warmest zeal for them, under pretence of being zealous for free grace, shall be rejected as fleshly zeal for their favourite passions, to which they make their false notions of grace subservient. Thus men of sound heads may be as corrupt in heart, and finally perish, as those who err in principle; as he who takes a wholesome medicine indiscreetly, without observing the proper regimen, may die by it as certainly as another does by poison.

Nor is it enough for answering the saving design of revelation, that we have such faith in it as makes some impression upon the heart, if that impression be not strong enough to produce a good life. To presume that we have faith and a good heart, and that the possession of these internal qualities renders a holy active life unnecessary, is a dangerous deceit; a deceit not uncommon in the world. And can it be seriously entertained by any, upon rational conviction, that a good heart and a bad life can consist together? If the heart be good, the life also must be good; if the tree be good, the fruit will be so of course. A bad life is a clear indication of a naughty heart, void of faith. “Shew me thy faith by thy works.” If this test be wanting, should men in the most rapturous zeal, declaim in praise of faith and grace, all is hollow hypocrisy, the selfish exultation of corruption in finding shelter and indulgence for itself in the grace of God.

As

As faith without works is vain, so exterior decency and sobriety of life, with confidence in its worth, is a deceit equally vain and fatal. Our works which flow not from a heart purified by faith, are but dead works, the superficial beauty of whited sepulchres which covers putrefaction within. In the heart, both vice and virtue, or sin and grace, have their root. For giving subsistence to virtue; for giving it real beauty and solidity in life, we must begin with levelling at corruption in the heart, that, by laying the axe to the root of the tree, we may bring down the whole body, root and branch; and that, having laid a new foundation of spiritual life, we may rear upon it the superstructure of a holy active life. First make the tree good, in order to its bearing good fruit. God having joined both together, it is at the hazard of our souls if we attempt to separate them.

Fairly to represent divine truths to the mind; strongly to inculcate them upon the heart, for its transformation, that, in life, its goodness may be expressed in all works of righteousness, is the design of the ministry; which, in conformity to the Bible, is to be diligently pursued, for bringing sinners to God, justified by faith, sanctified and made meet by the Spirit for every good work; Tit. ii. 11. 12.

This is a design worthy of God, in harmony with the wisdom and goodness of his first creation upon man, which he beheld, and pronounced

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good.

good. God made man after his own image ; man by sin at once defaced this image, and forfeited the divine favour. If God then shall pardon and save man, he must either call him back to his primeval sound constitution, or deny the wisdom and goodness of his first work.

It becomes the holiness of God, that, when he receives the offender into favour, he, at the same time, reconcile his heart to his holiness. And, indeed, this is ever his way. Those who once were enemies to him in their minds by wicked works, he reconciles, to himself, in Christ ; he makes them new creatures in Christ ; so that, in their hearts, they are no more enemies, but friends.

It becomes God, as a wise and righteous governor, that, while he pardons the sinner, he recover him from his disaffection and wanton disobedience. He would else encourage the licentious contempt of his law and government. Shall he seriously punish sin in the person of Christ, and yet favour it by taking the unrelenting viper into his bosom ? It is a contradiction in terms. No wise ruler will, in pardoning, intend to give the criminal a licence to continue his rebellion ; nor will he pardon a known traitor, who, he is sure, when at liberty, will plot the overthrow of his government.

How worthy the design, asserted above, is of God, appears from the purpose he intends to serve by his redeemed ones : viz. that they should manifest his glory,

glory, by shewing forth his virtues and praise. For this end the very nature of man is designed ; and what can be the design of redemption, but to restore man to his first perfect state for answering this end ? And can man answer this end, and remain an enemy in his heart, still disposed to be active in transgressing ? Being designed for the service of God, how necessary is it that the evil heart be first corrected and recovered from its disorders ? For God is a spirit, and must be served principally with our spirits. And the body being the soul's copartner, or the instrument by which it acts, it is also necessary, that the good affections of the soul be exhibited in all those fruits of righteousness, which are, through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

If we consider the heavenly state into which God intends to bring men ; the spiritual employments and enjoyments of that blessed state, to behold God's face, to sing his praise with joy and rapture ; we will see how necessary it is to cure the inbred disaffection of their hearts, to recall them from a sinful life, and to form them into a divine temper and exercise.

It is unworthy of a holy God to admit an impure creature into his presence and bosom. The nature of things forbids this incongruous union. Both the honour of God, and the happiness of the creature, forbid it. The sinner's heart, his taste, all his affections and senses being depraved with

fin; the resplendent glory, the refined entertainment and melody of heaven would be unsuitable and intolerable to him. It is necessary, therefore, that, for dwelling in bliss with God, men turn from sin: and also that their conversion and purgation from it commence and advance in this life, the school of discipline, in which habits of holiness must be formed, to qualify them for the pure delights of the heavenly state.

Upon the whole, nothing reflects more dishonour upon God and Christ; nothing can be more injurious to the gospel, and to the souls of men, than to represent the scheme of divine grace, as if, in giving encouragement to sinners, it gave countenance to sin. This contradicts the most obvious discoveries of God, by the light of reason and of revelation. And considering the proneness of human nature to catch at every encouragement to sin, all modes of expression, which tend to weaken, in the minds of men, the indispensable obligation upon them to relinquish sin, in turning to God through Christ, are highly unsafe, and carefully to be avoided. — This leads

II. To consider the means to be used for gaining the end of the sacred ministry.

It hath pleased God, that the treaty between him and men should be carried on by the ministry of men, chosen from among the people. How fit appears
this

this institution, from the weakness of the instruments to set forth the excellent glory of divine power and grace! How happily contrived to afford encouragement to men! when they see their fellows, in like deplorable circumstances with themselves, with express authority from God, and with evident signs of his assisting presence, publishing salvation to the world, and testifying, not only what they learn from scripture, but what they also know experimentally,—the terrors of God against sin; his loving favour and healing comforts to returning sinners.

But in order to the successful discharge of their duty, two things are pointed at in the text as indispensably necessary: *First*, That they *stand in the counsel of God*; *Secondly*, That *they cause his people to hear his words*.

The *first* of these respects the personal qualifications of a minister, and seems to allude to what passeth in the courts of earthly princes, where the sovereign distinguisheth some chosen persons as the objects of his peculiar favour, admits them into his secret counsel, and communicates his designs to them, which they are charged to carry into execution, both as to matter and manner, precisely in terms of the commission they receive from him. This, applied to ministers, who are the messengers of the Lord of hosts, implies,

1. That they who bring a message of peace from God to others, ought first to be themselves
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in favour with him. We are all, of whatever order, alike by nature, children of wrath, and must be reconciled in the one way common to all. Whoever therefore undertakes the ministry of reconciliation, ought first to consider the method of reconciliation; and, by consenting to it, make his peace with God, and be taken into favour.

It is quite incongruous, that a prince should impart his secrets to a known traitor; that he should employ in any important embassy, wherein the great interests of his kingdom and glory are deeply concerned, one whom he knows to be in heart disaffected to him; that he should send, with overtures of peace to others, one who himself never understood, nor approved, nor submitted to these overtures. Is it to be supposed that such a man will faithfully execute his commission; that he will be true to his prince, and hearty in persuading those to whom he is sent, to accept the offered peace? Will he not rather, when he sees it to be for his own interest, betray his trust, and treacherously go over to his master's enemies?

It is true, that God, in his providence, may permit a wrong-hearted man to enter into his sanctuary. And indeed, upon his plausible appearances in the eye of the world, it becomes allowable, yea dutiful, in the church to receive him: for, notwithstanding "his evil eye," or selfish intention, his gifts may be useful. But although,

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in the holy and wise administration of his providence, God permits the event, he approves not, but, in his word, and in the man's own conscience, forbids his presumptuous usurpation ; nor, however he may boast of " many wonderful works, " done by him in the name of Christ," will Christ acknowledge him as his servant at the last day ; but, with the stern countenance of a judge, will accost him thus : " What hadst thou to do to declare my statutes." Thou who hatedst instruction, and taught not thyself, how unseemly was it in thee that thou shouldst presume to teach another ?

Surely none, except the man who, by yielding himself to God, is in favour with him, ought to exercise the ministry : though it does not thence follow, that, merely by becoming God's friend, he is on that account fit to be sent on this embassy. Every one who believes in the Son, is the friend of God ; but he is not therefore qualified for every employment. There are diversities of gifts and talents adapted to the different stations of life. Every one ought to examine his own talents, and what occupation best befits them. When called to this, humbly undertake it, and conscientiously " abide in it with God ;" content and well-pleased with the present appointment of providence, quietly waiting till you are fairly called to act in a larger sphere, and fitted for it. Thus,

2. The words may imply, that for success in the ministry, one must have the call of God to
it

it. Every prince has the chusing of his own servants, and of the several departments proper for them to fill. They must not grasp at places, every one according to his liking, but must wait their master's disposal and call.

Upon this point, I venture only to say, that, from experience of the blessed effects of the gospel upon his own heart;—from the success of his application to study, in attaining a competent measure of gifts for instructing others;—and from other favourable circumstances in providence, *inviting* him, I may say, to take part of the ministry;—one may be comfortably satisfied of his call from God.

I will not affirm, that one may not lawfully, with God's allowance, minister divine truths to others, though he cannot confidently avow his own experience of their powerful influence. If Providence, from his youth, directed the course of his studies to sacred things;—if he has acquired a measure of gifts which sets him above the common or ordinary level of men;—if he is sincerely desirous to know the truth savingly, and with such desire searches the scriptures diligently;—if he be judged fit for the ministry, and properly called to it by the church, although he has not yet attained to great boldness in the faith, to a joyful assurance of the goodness of his state;—he may, nevertheless, have God's call to the ministry. It may be one of the duties necessary for
carrying

carrying on his own salvation, to exercise his gifts publicly for edifying the church.

Uncomfortable, indeed, is the minister's employment, if he is not clear as to his call from God, and acceptance with him. Discouraged with opposition, contradiction, and ill usage from the world, and with want of success; if then he doubts his authority from God, how can he support himself with the only comfort that remains? "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. — Surely my reward is with my God."

If a man be sincere, his mind cannot be easy till he know assuredly that he is a minister by the will of God, and has not run unsent. But though the evidence of this be not to his wish, if, while he studies for others, he searches for wisdom to himself, he ought not to fear that his exercising the ministry will be accounted usurpation and intrusion, but rather to believe it will be considered as the practice of a necessary duty for his own salvation, as for that of others. And it is highly probable, that one so sincerely and usefully employed, shall, before he goes off the world, obtain the desired satisfaction. Again,

3. The words imply, that after one has obtained favour with God, and good evidence of his call to the ministry, he must resolve ever to consult God for his instructions to men, and invariably to adhere to these, without presuming to add to

or to take from them, to enlarge or to abridge them. And if God's call, and not self-will, engages him in the work, he will naturally be led to minister to others the method of his own admission into favour, as the way of peace to all. "When it pleased God," says Paul, "to call me by his grace, and to reveal his Son in me, I conferred not with flesh and blood." As he consulted not the inclinations of animal nature, nor the dictates of human policy, as to the course he was to take, so neither did he think himself at liberty, as a minister of Christ, to deliver the arbitrary suggestions of his own or of other mens hearts, but that which he received of the Lord. We are indeed to consult and commune with our hearts, not to learn our divinity from their natural sentiments, but for perceiving the words of God in them, which alone we are authorised to minister as his mind. The prophets were to deliver nothing as God's mind, but what they had received from him, by one or other of the extraordinary methods by which he revealed himself to them. "He that hath my words, let him speak my words faithfully:" he who, on the contrary, taught the dreams and visions of his own fancy, or, as the Spirit expresses it, "the deceits of his own heart," was a false prophet. So he who, undervaluing the oracles of God, presumes to declaim from his own imagination, is a false teacher. The servant who knows his station,
and

and is true to his master, will study to know his mind, and deliver what he has from him in commission.

This brings me to the *second* thing expressed in the text as indispensably necessary for attaining the salutary end of the ministry, namely, that they who speak in the name of the Lord should *cause the people to hear the words of God*. This comprehends both the divine matter, and the language with which it is clothed.

These words of God are to be sought for in the canon of scripture, which contains a complete revelation of all that is necessary for the purposes of religion in this world, till we receive the end of our faith, the complete and everlasting salvation of our souls.

1. The divine matter, or the truths of scripture, are to be delivered. The mind of God, in the words of scripture, is diligently to be searched for, in dependence upon the Spirit of God, “who knows the sense of his own words,” and will reveal it to them who by meditation and prayer honestly inquire after it.

It is pretended, that it is not easy to ascertain the true sense of scripture; that its obscurity necessarily causes different opinions, and calls for mutual charity. This, in soft words, is an injurious reflection upon the scriptures; a sly disingenuous artifice, wherewith to cover hatred and contempt of the sacred writings, and the arbitrary interpretation

of them into any sense that agrees best with mens own favourite conceits.

In scripture there is but one mind, one way of salvation, the result of God's manifold wisdom; the knowledge and faith of which he has made necessary to salvation. He has therefore revealed it so, that a humble honest inquirer cannot miss of finding it. Why is it hid to so many "wise and "prudent?" Why are men so divided in opinion about its capital doctrines? We cannot help thinking, but that, for the most part, it is owing to the pride and passions of men, to their neglect of seeking truth in the proper way. They depend too little upon the aids of God's Spirit, and too much upon their own understandings; therefore, in recompence of their pride, they are left to stray bewildered as in a pathless desert. Humble souls, who sincerely search the scriptures, with fervent prayer, "that God may send forth his "light and truth," shall know the prime doctrines of scripture, which stand immediately connected with salvation.

These in general are, — man's fall from his first innocent state, whereby he lost both the favour and image of God; — man's want of power to restore himself to his forfeited happiness; — the necessity of a fit Mediator for this purpose; — the wonderful person of the Mediator, at once partaking of the nature of God and of man; — his various offices, with the suitableness and efficacy of these offices

offices for rendering him a complete and all-sufficient Saviour : — That, as the honour of God required, he, for our redemption, obeyed the law, and gave his life a ransom for our sins : — That God, “ in the depth of his wisdom, and for displaying the glorious riches of his grace, found and gave this Mediator,” and accepted his service in our room : — That for actual salvation by the Mediator, we must submit to his righteousness for justification, to the operations and government of his Spirit, for being sanctified, and reduced to obedience : — That this obedience of faith is itself the gift of God’s grace, which we must ask from him. “ These are all plain and right to him that understandeth ; he that runs may read them.” And however different men may have their different modes of expressing these doctrines, and view them in different degrees of light ; yet in the one true sense of them all true believers unanimously agree. I add,

That these truths are to be viewed, not separately and apart, but in their mutual dependence upon and connection with each other. The scriptures are not, like human productions, written with the art of composition ; nor do they proceed in a regular train of thoughts, with a laboured illustration of the dependence of one truth upon another, so as to form one entire well-digested system ; yet certainly they exhibit a settled plan, the deep-laid scheme of God’s manifold wisdom and grace.

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This scheme we are to search for, to make it familiar to ourselves, and to minister it to the world. If we deviate from it, "we fall from grace," and mislead others into error. We act like a foolish presumptuous builder, who departs from the plan he received from the architect, who alters, or adds to it the conceits of his own fancy, which disfigure the building, and turn the whole into a motley piece. And as these ill-judged affected additions enter not into the original plan, as they stand not firm upon the foundation, the builder, the building, and all concerned in it, "must suffer loss by them," 1 Cor. iii. 11. 12. We are workers together with God, employed to carry on his spiritual building, according to his plan, upon the foundation which he has laid, that of the apostles and prophets, whereof Jesus is the chief corner-stone. While we accommodate every part of our work to this plan and foundation, "the whole building, fitly framed together, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord."

May I be allowed here to glance at the indecent reflections thrown out against systems, and readers of systems, as if these systems were the arbitrary compositions of men, set up in opposition to the Bible; and the readers of them took them upon trust, and, without examination, adopted them as their creed?

And

And were not the authors of these systems men of genius, men learned in the original languages? Were they not men of application and piety? Have they not studied for themselves and for the church? Have they not supported what they wrote with scripture-authority, and left men to judge for themselves? Are not many who read them equally well qualified? Do they not examine them by scripture and reason? Because they take the help of these worthy authors, for the easier study of the scriptures, do they therefore take all that they read upon trust? Is their whole confession the effect of prejudice? If all our knowledge by these systems be prejudice, then whose knowledge is any more than prejudice? The disciples of Dr Taylor are men of prejudice as much as others.

It is no unjust severity to say, that the fastidious manner in which some speak against systems, betrays their vanity in no small degree. By such language they would have the world believe, that they are men of uncommon application and capacity; — that, for the knowledge of the truth, they go directly to the pure fountain of scripture. Is it not as probable, that, from dislike to labour, and to Bible-doctrines contained in systems, they speak so contemptuously of them? By going out of the common track of thinking, they would be thought to possess superior discernment, and strength of mind, far exalted above the ordinary
size

size of men. There is no evidence at all of this, but rather, that they are in the too common road to error and corruption, in company with the abject perverted part of mankind. Let them travel on together; there is no cause why we should envy their company or their road.

We are not ashamed of the Bible-scheme, as laid down in several approved systems, and in the CONFESSION of our church. Thousands, of eminent parts and piety, the wisest and best of men, in our own and in other churches, have found the most satisfying evidence of its truth to their minds, the sweetest rest and joy in it to their hearts. It is not therefore decent, modest, nor honest, in those who stand candidates for charges in the church, either to set aside this truly excellent scheme, or to deface its beautiful frame, by retailing only some detached pieces of it, coloured over with the tinsel of a little dazzling eloquence.

Would these men confess, as they ought, that their turn lies another way; that they never considered nor felt, that for pleasing the Deity one scheme of religion and of virtue was more necessary than another; they should demand our pity: but to presume, from pretensions to superior knowledge, to introduce such a great alteration in our Confessional, who that has any sense of propriety, can help feeling indignation at such arrogance? A novice! to pour contempt at once upon the
mediatory

mediatory plan, and upon the many thousands in former and latter days, who have expressed their happiness and joy in the faith of it, is truly insufferable. And what are those mens greater advantages, by nature, by education, by application, or by grace, for discovering truth? Will they say, that the secrets of God are with them? For aught that appears to us, it is probable, that these secrets are intrusted rather with another sort of men. The fact is, they have got early acquaintance with books of a particular cast; with the novelty and spruceness of which they are hastily taken, and so intoxicated, that they swallow them whole, without reflection or examination; not willing to suspect fallacy or danger in what is so grateful to their juvenile taste; being so unhappy as to have no serious disposition to find the truth for their own comfort and salvation. To gain the world's applause for distinguished ingenuity, for sprightly turns of expression, and for delicacy of taste, is the darling object in view: "Vain man would be wise." But no man needs fear, that the subject of the gospel will cramp his genius. There is full scope for the most unbounded imagination, to expatiate in the ample field of scripture, amidst the vast wonders of redeeming love. Here indeed is a field, large and copious, to employ the genius of an angel. It is the chief theme that employs the sublime contemplative powers, that inspires the loftiest songs of the whole

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angelic

angelic host, cherubims and seraphims, all the great intellects of the upper world. It is very strange, that it should be deemed a subject too confined for a little earthly genius. Again,

2. We are to deliver scripture-truths in grave scripture-language: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." They were infallibly led to the matter, and also to the words: at the same time that their diction was left to run agreeably to each writer's particular genius in language; the words most fitly expressive of the divine matter were suggested.

These words, chosen by the Spirit, are the fittest for conveying his sense to our minds. The truths, therefore, are to be delivered, as nearly as we can, in his words. This requires not that our whole discourse be precisely in scripture-terms; for then must we leave off preaching, and turn mere readers, nay readers of Hebrew and Greek. The mind of scripture is chiefly to be attended to. For expressing this, "we are to seek out acceptable words;" words pertinent and agreeable. They are the more so, the nearer they approach to scripture-language. In using our own, we are to avoid the extremes of a flat groveling meanness, and an affected swelling sublimity; and, as much as possible, to keep up the beautiful simplicity of the sacred writings; supporting every point with an apposite scripture-citation, evidently expressive

pressive of the purpose in hand. How transcendent is the beauty and energy of the scriptures, pertinently applied! “They are as apples of gold
“ in pictures of silver.” They are as the king’s signet to all our discourses, giving them grandeur, demonstration, and authority. Indeed, after all our reasoning, and persuasive pleadings, it is found, that they are the very words of scripture which gain upon the consciences and hearts of the hearers, which alarm, pierce, wound, and heal them. We ought not therefore to shun introducing them copiously into our sermons. At the same time, if the mind of the Spirit be preserved, it is not necessary that the whole discourse should continue to run in the express words of scripture.

This gives occasion to animadvert a little upon the frivolous cavils against the Confession, which all intrants to the church are required to subscribe, as if this was an imposition of unscriptural terms of Christian communion. We are not required to subscribe to it as a mere human composition; but as a collection of divine truths, set down in other words, more familiar in common use, expressing the obvious sense of the words of scripture.

And is the Confession, especially the doctrinal part of it, complained of for differing from the sense of scripture, and not rather for being too plainly expressive of it? Many worthy persons, who, from their youth to old age, continue to

examine it by scripture, can see no difference, but the most perfect harmony between them. Infidels themselves confess, that the doctrines of the Confession most controverted by professing Christians, are the clear language of scripture; such as, the doctrine of the Trinity, — the divinity of our Saviour, — the necessity of supernatural grace, and justification by faith. — The Confession is inveighed against by some, not for clashing, but for agreeing with these scripture-doctrines; which, because they fall not within the narrow compass of their reason, they will not allow to be true, either in scripture or in the Confession. The mind of both, with respect to these doctrines, is very clear, and alike clear in each: in the one, and in the other, there is no darkness at all. No ingenuous man can pretend ignorance of the sense of the Confession, and of the society's mind in it. Their very quarrelling with it shews that they perceive it. It is impossible, therefore, to reconcile their conduct to candour and common honesty, who, in order to obtain the temporal emoluments, subscribe with a mind contrary to the well known mind of the society.

That it is required of all intrants to subscribe the Confession, cannot justly be complained of. It is a privilege of right belonging to every society, to provide in the best manner for its own safety and purity. And no injury is done to any in being excluded from the society, who, by refusing

sing to subscribe to its laws and principles, seem resolved to assert and propagate the contrary.

After we have subscribed this confession, should the majority of the society depart from the principles of their first foundation, and require our concurrence in supporting contrary measures; we certainly ought, in conscience, to decline compliance, and strenuously to stand to the original laws, the terms of our admission. Should such recusants, by an arbitrary stretch of power, be deprived; let them resolve to suffer wrong patiently. While one is permitted to keep his place, he ought not, willingly, to desert it, but to "abide in it;" and, by doing his duty faithfully, contribute his help to restore the laws to their ancient vigour. Thus, by the honest struggles of a few, "with meekness of wisdom," matters may be brought to rights again. A hasty attempt, even upon the defection of the majority, to reprobate and overturn the old church, and to begin rearing a new one, in a separate state, may be hazardous to the rash undertakers, blasting to their ministry, and hurtful to the constitution for which they zealously contend. The old constitutional principles being still acknowledged, the true friends of the constitution act most effectually for its preservation, for its perpetual prosperity and glory, by conforming steadily to its rules, in their practice; and by doing their utmost, in fellowship with the community, to persuade other members to the like conformity. But from this digression I proceed,

3. To observe, that “to cause men to hear “the words of God,” may imply a certain manner, fit to engage and to command their attention and regard.

As to action and gesture, — let it be natural and easy, moving between the extremes of awkward rusticity and airy affectation. Nature, under some correction, is the best guide: it never offends. The gesture therefore must vary in different speakers, according to the difference in their natural complexions.

As the matter ought ever to consist of the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus, so ought it to be asserted as plain acknowledged truth, unfermented with the fretting gangrene of controversy and perverse disputings, which foster a vain contentious humour, “and hinder godly edifying.”

Also the divine matter ought to be delivered with “all gravity,” with dignity of deportment and speech: “But speak thou the things which “become sound doctrine, in sound speech that “cannot be condemned;” with such decency of mien and language, as becomes the dignity of the subject. Therefore low diminutive similes, — false improper metaphors, — trivial quaint turns of wit, which tend to debase the important subject, to raise the contempt and laughter of the intelligent audience, are to be avoided.

As we are “to shew uncorruptness in doctrine, “and gravity of deportment, so likewise sincerity;” our appearance declaring to others, that we speak
under

under the awe of God ; that we believe what we say to be his truth ; that, without disguise, we study to hold it forth in its true light : “ For we
“ are not as many who corrupt the word of God ;
“ but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight
“ of God, speak we in Christ.”

We are also to deliver the truth with authority ; with modesty, but with boldness, as it becomes those who are satisfied that it is the truth of God ; they declare that they have authority from him to declare it ; that, as the very truth of God, it recommends itself to the consciences of men : “ We handle the word of God by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to
“ every man’s conscience, in the sight of God.”
“ Therefore we are not ashamed of the gospel of
“ Christ.”

At the same time our authority is to be tempered with a moderate degree of fear and diffidence in ourselves : “ And I was with you in weakness,
“ and in fear, and in much trembling.” A proper expression this of reverence for God and for his truth ; of due concern to support the honour of our character ; that we may succeed in our embassy, and that it may not miscarry in our unskilful hands.

Thus, again, we are to speak so as to satisfy the people of our fervent love of souls ; that our view is not to please, but to save men ; — that we seek not ourselves, but their salvation in hearkening to the truth : “ As we are allowed of
“ God

“ God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so
“ we speak ; not as pleasing men, but God, who
“ trieth our hearts.” — “ Nor of men sought we
“ glory, neither of you, nor of others ; but being
“ affectionately desirous of you, we were willing
“ to have imparted unto you, not only the gospel
“ of God, but also our own souls, because ye
“ were dear unto us.”

In fine, for causing men to hear the words of God from us, the recommendation of a good life is absolutely necessary. — “ These things command and teach,” said the Apostle Paul to Timothy. But he did not stop there : to all his other directions he subjoined the following charge : — “ Let no man despise thy youth ; but be
“ thou an example of believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” This good life extends far ; it comprehends the government of our whole behaviour towards ourselves and others, righteous and unrighteous, according to the word of God. — Our moderation and temperance must be manifest to all men. Nor must decent sobriety be the whole of our recommendation ; it is necessary that our life be adorned with the beauties of holiness : “ Ye
“ are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and
“ justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves
“ among you who believe.”

Towards the people of our charge we ought to walk in love ; by diligent labour, with all gentleness, and meekness of wisdom, testifying our hearty
concern

concern for their everlasting interest, and for their easy accommodation in time also. “ But we were
“ gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth
“ her children. — As you know how we exhorted,
“ and comforted, and charged every one of you,
“ as a father doth his children, that ye would
“ walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto
“ his kingdom and glory.” — In like manner, recommending ourselves to those who believe not ; — to the froward and disobedient, by all expressions of good-will, by courtesy and kindness, and by suffering wrong with patience ; shewing, that, when injured, we seek not revenge, but the offender’s recovery to God : “ In all things, thus
“ approving ourselves as the ministers of God,
“ in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities,
“ in distresses, — by pureness, — by knowledge,
“ — by long-suffering, — by kindness, — by the
“ Holy Ghost, — by love unfeigned.” Thus living, we testify to the world our own belief of the gospel, and its mighty influence upon our hearts and lives ; — a powerful engagement upon others to hearken to us ! But if our practice contradicts our doctrine, we forfeit credit with the world, —
“ render ourselves base and contemptible before all
“ the people, — cause many to stumble at the law.” — And God and men, and our own consciences, will cry out against us in these words of severe but just reproach. — “ Therefore thou art
“ excusable, O man, whosoever thou art that
“ judgest : for wherein thou judgest another, thou
E “ condemnest

“condemnest thyself. — And thinkest thou this,
“O man, that judgest them who do such things,
“and dost the same, that thou shalt escape
“the judgement of God?”

P A R T S E C O N D.

III. I SHALL now proceed to illustrate the connection between the means and the end, which was the third thing proposed in the method. — And this connection will appear, if we consider,

1. That they are absolutely necessary for gaining the end proposed; or, the only means that can be effectual for turning sinners from their evil ways, and from the evil of their doings. The scripture contains God's plan, his method of reconciliation, on which he laid out his manifold wisdom. — As being truly his scheme, according to which alone he purposes to save men, it is propounded to our faith.

And is there not the best evidence of its truth, that it is of God? — Read the history of the Bible, the astonishing interpositions of Providence in favour of the Israelites, the seed of Abraham, in preserving and delivering them when they were few in number, and after they were multiplied. Read the history of the men of God, to whom he revealed himself, — what effect the revelation had upon them, — how they lived, — how they conquered, — how they died. — Above all, fix your attention upon the divers typical representations
of

of the promised Messiah, — the circumstantial delineations of him, by different persons, in different ages; the prophecies respecting his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven; and see all these in the minutest circumstances, fulfilled in the New-Testament history concerning Jesus. — Attend also to the signally great effects of his victory and exaltation, continued, by the ministry of the word, to this day; and say, if this be not the grand contrivance of Heaven, in which the highest glory of God, and the most important interests of men, are deeply concerned: — to which all the great actings of Providence referred, and to the accomplishment of which all were directed. — To disbelieve and reject it amidst such a flood of evidence as comes pouring upon our reason and all our senses, marks the most criminal infidelity, guilt of the deepest dye. — To preach it, without believing it, betrays the darkest Atheism. — To profess to believe it, and yet, craftily, to explain away its very essence, and, in its place, to substitute mens own corrupt gloss, is the basest, vilest hypocrisy, most hateful to God, and to all honest men.

Every perverse turn which men give to the sacred oracles they call gospel. Thus will every one dignify his own fancied gloss; falsely pretending, that, only in the mode of expressing things, he differs from the commonly-received gospel.

Were the difference only in expression, and the substance of the truth still retained, this would easily be seen, and borne with. — When, with the

ordinary natural form of expression, the truth itself is departed from, this is as easily seen. And however this supposititious thing be named *gospel*, it is not the Apostle's gospel, but another, spurious and false, by which unhappy impostors may for a time succeed in corrupting the unwary in their principles and morals; but, in the issue, shall "bring upon themselves swift destruction," by the provoked vengeance of Heaven, according to that awful malediction, Gal. i. 8. — "Should we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than that which the apostles have preached, let him be accursed." But,

2. As the scriptures are the only means for turning men to God, so there is likewise, in regard of both matter and expression, a peculiar fitness in them for gaining this end. The account they give of the divine perfections, being the most rational, must be the best adapted to satisfy the understanding: And the expression which is equally clear and strong, is by far the fittest vehicle to convey just and great ideas of God.

In scripture-phrazeology there is inimitable grandeur and magnificence, at the same time a natural simplicity, which gives the whole a convincing air of truth. The surpassing greatness and majesty in scripture-expression, is a greatness breathed into it by the native greatness of the matter. We see in it no periods wrought up with painful labour and art; but the sublime matter every where putting on its natural graceful garb,
that

that unaffected dignity and ease with which it becomes the Omnipotent to say and to do every thing.

I shall give a few specimens of the fitness of the matter and the expression of scripture, to turn us to God, as they give us the most honourable views of him, and are adapted to work upon our fear, hope, and love, and to recommend themselves to our consciences.

How august is the scripture-account of God's necessary self-existence and unity! — “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” — Himself uncreated, existing necessarily, and but one. — “I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me. — Is there a God besides me? — “Yea there is no God, I know not any. — I am Jehovah, and there is none else. — There is no God besides me.” — This is powerful to command our entire dependence upon God, and subjection to him.

In what awful terms, fit to alarm our fears, do the scriptures set forth the holiness of God, his abhorrence of sin, his inviolable justice, and his awful determination of vengeance upon the disobedient: “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?” — “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold sin; nor canst thou look on iniquity.” — “When the Lord saw the abominations of his people, he abhorred his sons and daughters, and said, I will hide my face, I will
“ turn

“ turn away from them.” — “ Evil cannot dwell
“ with him.” — “ A God of truth, and without
“ iniquity, just and right is he.” Just in his nature, just in executing his laws, in supporting his government. Even when he gives men the hope of mercy, he excludes from it the impenitent, and threatens them with wrath and hell at the revelation of the righteous judgement of God. — How frightful his threatenings against the disobedient, that he shall punish them with everlasting destruction ! “ For a fire,” saith he, “ is kindled
“ in mine anger, and shall burn into the lowest
“ hell.” — And shall not destruction from the Almighty be a terror unto us ? On hearing of which tremendous words, can we forbear expressing their effect upon us in the language of the prophet ? — “ My lips quivered at the voice ; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled
“ in myself, that I might rest in the day of
“ trouble.”

They are also fit to work upon our hope, as they represent God at once holy and merciful :
“ The Lord God is merciful and gracious, whilst
“ he by no means clears the guilty.” — “ There
“ is forgiveness with God, and plenteous redemption.” — “ Return, ye backsliding children :
“ ye have played the harlot with many lovers ;
“ yet return unto me. — Though your sins be as
“ scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though
“ they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

— “ If

— “ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat
“ the good of the land ; but if ye refuse and re-
“ bel, ye shall be devoured with the sword : for
“ the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” —
“ Turn ye at my reproof : behold, I will pour
“ out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my
“ words unto you.”

Let me subjoin the striking representation in scripture of the last judgement, as fit to work upon both our fear and hope, and so to turn us from sin to God. — Attend to the view given of the judge, — of his appearance, — of the process, — of the sentence, — of the issue of the sentence, — and of the everlasting state of the two different parties that ensues upon the execution of the sentence : “ Then the Son of man, the Son of God in his glorified human nature, shall come in his glory, with all the holy angels, thousands of thousands, like a fiery stream, issuing forth from before him. — And he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, — and before him shall be gathered all nations : — for with the shout of a descending God, — with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, the dead shall be raised. — The sea shall give up the dead which are in it : the graves shall open, and deliver up the dead which are in them : and all the dead, small and great, shall stand before God. — The judgement being set, he shall separate the assembled world, the righteous from the unrighteous, as a shepherd divideth

divideth his sheep from the goats, placing the one on his right hand, the other on his left. — Then the books shall be opened, the awful registers of life and death, and men shall be judged out of these faithful records, every one according to his works ;” the judge, to shew himself upright, pointing out the accepted works of his redeemed, distinguished, for truth and substance, from the mere semblance of them in others. — “ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. — Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. — And these shall go into everlasting punishment, the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, where the smoke of the torment ascendeth for ever and ever, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched. — But the righteous shall go into everlasting life.” They shall ascend, with triumphant acclamations of joy, upward to the third heavens, where they shall be ever with the Lord ; “ in whose presence is fulness of joy, at whose right hand are pleasures for ever more. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat : for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water ; and

God

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.—And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things shall pass away.—The ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, where with holy rapture they shall worship God day and night in his temple, saying, with a loud voice, Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever and ever.” Did ever the heart or imagination of man conceive a scene and language like this?—so grand, so godlike? How low, before it, sink the boldest flights of human invention and speech! Is not this the divine language of heaven? Are not these the sublime words of one caught up into paradise? words which it is not possible for one uninspired of God to imagine, or to utter? Do they not strike conscience with awe, and extort from it the confession,—“Of a truth God is in these words?” Can a man hear them, without perceiving in them the authoritative majesty of God’s voice; without feeling the liveliest concern to escape the wrath, and to obtain the glory, they describe, by turning from sin to God?

Permit me, before I conclude this head, to do justice to the mediatory scheme in general, by shewing, that as it alone is effectual for the salvation of sinners, so its direct tendency is to turn men from sin to God.

It betrays amazing inattention or wilful resistance to the clearest light, to represent it, either as favouring sin, or flattering man's conceit of his natural powers. If rightly understood, it heightens our reverential view of God's glorious holiness and inflexible justice, as well as of his engaging mercy and grace, and powerfully enforces the motives to repentance and holy obedience.

The scripture-expressions of God's holiness and justice already taken notice of, are all upon the mediatory plan; spoken by Jehovah, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself; spoken by the Mediator himself, as the infallible prophet of his church. All is the language of his mediation, and all the doctrines relating to it call men from sin to God, and proclaim the necessity of their conformity to him in holiness; — the scheme, in all its parts, directly pointing at this as its end.

Man being fallen, by transgression, from the favour and image of God, the Mediator's design is to restore him to both; the one as well as the other being necessary for his happiness. Therefore, to procure man's redemption from the curse, and to restore him to favour, Jesus dies for man. He dies, not merely to manifest God's severity against sin in general; for had this been all that was intended by his death, God might, for his sake, restore angels as well as men: but he died, as was necessary, for satisfaction to justice, in the nature that sinned. The Messiah, therefore, be-
comes

comes man, and dies a real proper sacrifice for sin; by which the bar from law and justice to man's return to favour is removed. — Still more than this, he, by his obedience, acquired right in law to the “fulness of the Spirit,” toward the renovation of his people, for whom he died; this being necessary to qualify them for the service and enjoyment of God; in order to which, deliverance from corruption necessarily accompanies deliverance from the curse of the law; this same corruption, by which the soul is alienated from God, being itself a part, if not the forest part of the curse. Nor is it possible to conceive of the curse removed, and sin at the same time maintaining its dominion over the soul. The curse, therefore, being taken away, sin of course loses its strength, and dies apace.

This will appear from the nature of that faith which is made necessary in order to actual benefit by Christ; and that is, to submit to Christ as our strength, as well as our righteousness; which implies, that we submit to the operations of his Spirit for our sanctification. He is as much the object of faith for this purpose, as he is for justification; he being made of God, unto us, not only righteousness, but sanctification also; although it be the natural order, to view him first in his priestly character, that being relieved of the curse by the merit of his sacrifice, our access to the

fountain of life may thereby be opened for our sanctification.

This faith being of grace, and “by the operation of the Spirit of grace,” it must be of such a nature as answers the grand design of divine wisdom and grace, to abolish sin, by the incarnation, the obedience, and death, of his own dear Son, on the accursed tree, as the sacrifice and atonement for guilty man. And it is essential to the nature of true faith, to influence submission to this great design of the death of Christ, “who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil; and gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

Great are our advantages, upon this scheme, for subduing sin, and advancing in holiness, having by faith redemption in the blood of Christ, and a communication with “the fullness of God in him.” It is the province of faith, or it is the operation of the soul under the influence of faith, to submit to Christ, to depend upon him, to ask all needful supplies of grace from him. And thus, while faith gives to God the due honour of his holiness, it ascribes all to grace; as it is fit that divine grace should have the entire glory of pardoning and restoring forward rebels.

That the purifying believers from the defilements of sin, is what the scheme of grace, and true faith in harmony with it, aims at, is evident from

from the strain of the new covenant, from the account we have of the first emanation of its virtue, towards the production of faith in man's heart :
“ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and cleanse you from all your idols.—I will take away the heart of stone ;—I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord.—And I will be their God ; for they shall return to me with their whole heart.”

This is the express design of all the promises which faith respects, that by them we may purify ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. And it is almost unnecessary to observe, that the threatenings are intended to deter us from sin :—“ If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation to devour the adversary, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not the gospel.”

Christ, who best understood the genius of his own religion, commanded all men to repent, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. His apostles, full of the Holy Ghost, took up his text, and vehemently pressed the same doctrine, teaching publicly, and from house to house, “ testifying to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our
Lord

Lord Jesus Christ," as inseparably connected by divine constitution, and in the very nature of things. Thus the scriptures speak of God's granting repentance to the Gentiles, and purifying their hearts by faith. Nor is this all : for we find unbelievers, men in a natural state, are said to be foolish and disobedient ; but when the gospel comes to them in power, and in much assurance, then they are represented as turned unto God from idols.

It would be an easy task to shew, that the consideration of the state and place to which the gospel calls us, to wit, God's kingdom and glory, serves also to draw us from sin, and persuade us to holy obedience. But enough hath been said to illustrate the direct tendency of the gospel-scheme to turn men from sin to God.—It may, by some, be judged unnecessary to dwell so particularly upon a point so plain : but plain and obvious as it is, the subtle corruption of man's heart finds a way of eluding its evidence. For many professing Christians, by their expressions and practice, betray their misapprehension of the gospel, and their froward disposition to turn its grace to licentiousness.—And did ever a more unaccountable delusion possess the minds of men, than the hope of being admitted into God's favour and presence, upon the mediatory plan, without improving it for their purification from sin.

But,

But, lastly, The gospel-scheme is peculiarly fitted to the purpose of mens conversion to God, in regard of its efficacy, by the promise of the Spirit. — “Go, teach all nations, — preaching repentance and remission of sins in my name, and lo, I am with you alway to the end of the world.” — “I will send the Comforter, the Holy Ghost : — he will teach you all things ; — he will convince the world of sin ; — he will take of mine, and shew it unto you.” The word of God, accompanied with this promise, is like fire that melts, or a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. — “Holding forth the word of life,” we may expect the promised Spirit, and success by his concurring influence. — Whereas, if to the wholesome words of Jesus we prefer our own fancies, these shall be left of the Spirit to their own natural weakness ; and whatever value we may put upon such splendid conceits, they are, compared with simple gospel-truths, but as chaff to the wheat, and can have no good effect. They may afford a little temporary amusement to itching ears, but shall make no impression upon the heart, nor ever produce in it any thing like genuine piety. These carnal weapons have no fitness in themselves, and it is vain to pray for a blessing upon them. God hath not promised to bless them ; and, beyond his promise, no prayer can extort a blessing from him. — Mens vain conceits,

conceits, their fine-wrought declamations upon virtue, substituted in place of plain gospel, equally unfit in themselves, and unblest of God, will never penetrate the heart, either to wound or to heal it. Whereas “the word of God is quick and
“powerful, and sharper than any two-edged
“sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of
“soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,
“and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of
“the heart.”

IV. I shall now review the whole, and apply it in several inferences. And,

I. From what has been said, we see the design of the ministry, a design of the greatest importance to the world, — to turn men from the power of sin and Satan, — to restore them to the favour and image of God, — to bring them to the enjoyment of him, in an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace.

To this momentous point, all our sermons, our whole life, our most vigorous efforts, ought to be directed : not merely to furnish mens heads with notions ; far less to engage them in parties, and to inflame their angry passions against one another ; but to divorce their hearts from sin and worldly vanities ; — to direct them to God, and the great objects of the invisible world ; — to unfold and illustrate the mediatory scheme, so as to make men see that this is its scope and direct tendency ; —
that

that it is not intended for speculation only, but for practice, to mend the heart and life;—that if it produces not this effect, however sound mens opinions may be, it leaves them where it found them, under the curse.

Careful ought we to be, that, in ministring the grace of God, we use no form of words from which men may draw the least encouragement to a libertine life; but testify, with the scriptures, in words of no ambiguity, that, had we light to behold all the glories of holiness and grace in Christ, yet, if it be not a light powerful to transform us into his image, it is unavailable for salvation. This is doing justice to the scheme; we represent it truly, as it is, in a light worthy of a holy God.—To put another face upon it, is to do it the most flagrant injury and dishonour,—“to pervert, and handle the word of God deceitfully,” to the prejudice and ruin of immortal souls. Therefore,

2. The subject warns us, ministers, to make this our chief study, to convert men to God. And, did we consult with God, with his word, and with conscience; did we rightly understand our work; this we would propose to ourselves as the principal, if not the sole end of our labours and studies.—For gaining this end, how seriously would we plead, how humbly would we walk with God in holy duties; and how diligently would we seek out the fittest sentiments and words, for alarming,

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larming, for wounding, and healing the hearts of our hearers!—Happy were it for the church of God, did we thus employ our talents; if, instead of forming political unions, and contending for pre-eminence, who shall have the lead, who shall engage the strongest party, and secure the chief influence in disposing of the benefices of the church, we laid out the vigour of our genius, in devising means “for bringing sinners to God,” in harmony with the Mediator’s design.

3. The subject directs us to the only proper means for gaining this end; that is, God’s gracious plan of salvation, delivered in the scripture. For gaining God’s end we must use God’s means. Vain men are ever presuming to depart from this plan; or to alter it, and in their wisdom to reduce it to the form of the first condition of life to innocent Adam. The pretence is, that the scheme of grace hurts morals. But can this, indeed, be the real cause of mens dislike of it?—Do we not see, that they are not the most distinguished for a consistent uniform course of virtuous conduct, whose prevailing turn is, to descant upon the nature and beauty of virtue; and that the dissolute and immoral are best pleased with such discourses. Whence then is mens distaste at the gospel-scheme? 1. From the pride of corrupted nature, which cannot endure to hear the mortifying truth, That, for doing good, what is in *all* respects good, there remains in man naturally no disposition nor strength.

2. From

2. From the enmity of the carnal mind against holiness. — The gospel gives the most frightful discovery of the evil of sin, and of the unrelenting severity of divine justice against it, while it intimates the necessity of Christ's death for atoning it; and the necessity upon us to submit to him for the destruction of sin. From this, mens consciences secretly perceive, that the gospel strikes at the very root of sin. — Unwilling to yield to this, they are easily persuaded, that, without a satisfaction, the pardon of their *infirmities* (as they call their vices) may be obtained from the goodness of God. And if, without a satisfaction, the pardon of one or more sins may be hoped for, the heart is cunning enough, from the unlimited goodness of God, to expect the gracious forgiveness of all sins. And thus, in truth, a self-righteous, as well as an Antinomian spirit, leads to licentiousness.

3. From a disposition to magnify the powers of nature, men are emboldened in their present criminal pursuits, by the hope of being able to repent when they please. Whereas, the gospel, by levelling our boasted natural powers, and by asserting that faith and repentance are the gifts and effects of divine grace, calls us immediately to break off our sins and sloth, lest, by wilfully-indulged delay, we provoke the spirit to depart, and to give us up to a "reprobate mind." — The gospel-plan, therefore, both as it is commanded of God, and is best adapted in itself for turning men to him, that, and that alone, we are to preach.

This requires a diligent searching of the scriptures, for gaining acquaintance with the scheme. — It requires our serious concern and labour to feel, to know it experimentally, that as “scribes well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” we may make it manifest to others, as we ought. “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.”

Thus we are to deliver it purely, unmixed with our own dreams and fancies. — We may not presume to render it more fit, as we vainly think, for the purposes of religion, by accommodating it to the taste of the world. We must take it as it stands in the Bible, keeping strictly to our instructions: “It is the wisdom and power of God for salvation.” By attempting to mend or new-model it, we but spoil and weaken it: every refinement of man upon it, is “a wild gourd,” which brings poison and death into our food.

As we are to minister the gospel purely, free from every erroneous mixture of human invention; so from the gaudy ornaments of over-laboured eloquence, “the enticing words of man’s wisdom,” and deliver it in the native simplicity of its own scripture-dress. Artificial embellishments of style may be too much studied, and be the chief recommendation of some discourses, from which, if you take these brilliant colourings, what remains is of little or no consequence.

What has such childish toying to do with the business of preaching? The gospel is too serious

a subject for men to display their wit, and little arts of busking, upon it. We would scarce think him serious, who, in announcing wrath and hell against sin, and warning men speedily to make their escape to the Saviour from these dreadful evils, should take time to cull flowers of rhetoric wherewith to garnish his discourse, and to shew his own skill in making a fine tale of it. Did the alarming object fill his eye, it would pour from his lips a torrent of natural eloquence, such as flows freely from him who feelingly sees the real danger from which he calls others to make their escape.

By this it is not meant to restrain any from using God's particular gift to him, the agreeable art of persuasion, for insinuating himself into the affections of his hearers. — This is duty : “ Because the preacher was wise, he sought to find out acceptable words.” We are to act like a wise physician, who so mixes his medicine, that the patient may take it down without excessive disgust; yet not so as to weaken its salutary virtue, by making it too palatable. Thus are we to chuse our words, so as not to offend by a slovenly coarseness of style; at the same time avoiding the other extreme, a finical spruceness; that the splendor and delusive charms of words may not predominate in the discourse, so as to engage the peoples attention more to the art of the speaker than to the weight of the matter.

We ought also to minister the word dispassionately,

nately, in the meek spirit of the gospel, without any mixture of strange fire : “ The man of God must be meek, and his words with meekness of wisdom.” The word never enters more kindly than when it falls most gently : “ Ride prosperously in thy majesty, because of meekness,” &c. “ The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” If we admit a fever into our spirits, it will convey a feverish heat into the sincere milk of the word, which will breed ill blood in the hearers, — surly prejudice against us and our doctrine.

Warm we ought to be, but it must be the warmth of love. While we shew ourselves all fire against sin, we must then appear to burn only with love to souls ; meek and forgiving in our own cause, reserving all our heat for the cause of our God. And he may take most liberty in reproving offences against God, who shews the greatest readiness to forgive the wrongs that are done to himself. This leads

To observe another mean by which we gain the great end of our ministry, i. e. a cordial union among ourselves, in carrying on the common interest of our one Lord : “ Now we beseech you, brethren,” says Paul, “ by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things ; and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgement.”—

“ When

“ When the watchmen thus lift up the voice together, Zion prospers.” When, on the contrary, we “ consult with flesh and blood,” and are by our selfish passions distracted and divided; when we run into parties, and contend who shall lord it over the rest; we foolishly pull down what we ought to build up and maintain.

The pride of man is not easily subject to Presbyterian parity. The ambitious cannot brook its restraints. At the very time they profess regard for the constitution, they will strain hard to obtain the pre-eminence it forbids. Hence it is, that some, turning aside from their proper work to the study of politics, employ their time and talents in devising how they may outwit and disconcert their rivals. This is the gift wherein they covet to excel. And what is this boasted excellence, but superior dexterity in priestcraft and deceit?

For conducting the government of the church, wisdom and prudence in a high degree are requisite; and for this some are peculiarly gifted above others. Let such employ their talents, with meekness of wisdom, for the peace and prosperity of the church; and they shall be respected, and submitted to.

Were we all disposed to act honestly for what ought to be the common interest of all, there would be no occasion for treading in the dark mazes of policy. No material difference in opinion or conduct could subsist long among us, there
being

being no intricacy in the principles of the church to cause such difference. These are well known, or may easily be known. Our disagreement must therefore proceed from other causes,—our jarring interests, our selfish views and passions.

In such a great body as a national church, it is not to be supposed but there shall be differences, arising from the mixture of corrupt members, and from different degrees of light in her sound ones. As to differences in lesser matters, mutual forbearance is to be exercised; without this, no society can for any time keep together. With rigour to press compliance in every point, doth not secure, but breaks order and peace. It is strange that this is not adverted to, and that the forbearance which Christianity requires is not exercised. Whence can this proceed? Do the principles of the church forbid it? It is a shameful reflection upon any church-constitution, to say it prohibits forbearance where God's word requires it. The dishonourable imputation applies not to the principles of the church, but to the spirit of its members. — Can the principles of the church deny forbearance to any in acting conformably to these principles, against a measure contradictory to them? Do they not grant even greater indulgence than this, as not only consistent with, but necessary, to the safety, to the beauty, to the peace, and all the valuable concerns of every church of Christ? That discipline

pline which denies mutual forbearance with respect to lesser differences, while it relaxes of its severity towards trespasses upon "the weightier matters of the law," is liable to suspicion, that it proceeds from "the evil spirit in man that lusteth to envy;" and that the true interest of the constitution is not the favourite object. — They are ordinarily the wisest and best of men, who are most indulgent to the religious scruples of others. And it is notorious, that those who are most forward and rigid in forcing uniformity in every point of external order, are far from meriting the character of superior regard for religion, in principle or practice. This leads to observe,

That we must recommend our doctrine by a sober, prudent, and pious life. Without this, all we say will lose its credit and effect. Preaching well, and living loosely, gives men occasion to say, Either this is not the gospel, or these are not Christians. It is by living the doctrine we preach that we preserve our authority among the people; and our attempting to secure respect without a good conversation is a mere struggle for lordly domination. This is implied in Peter's words, 1 Pet. v. 3. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock;" which plainly intimates, that it is only by transcribing our doctrine into our lives; by recommending ourselves to the consciences of men, both by

an exemplary life, and by sound doctrine, that we can expect to maintain our authority as the ministers of Christ. So preaching, and so living, taking heed to ourselves and to our doctrine, we may hope to succeed in turning men to God : Mal. ii. 6. "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity." So intending, and so succeeding, joyful shall be the meeting between the servant and his Lord. Glorious shall be the reward of the faithful. When the chief Shepherd shall appear, he shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. When the sleeping dead shall awake, and come forth, then "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they who turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."—But wo to that evil servant, who says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming ;" and so presuming, lets loose the reins to his passions. See his fearful doom, Matth. xxiv. 48.—51.

4. If it be the minister's business to speak the words of God, for turning men to him, then certainly ought the people, with this intention, to hear them from us. Be ye well acquainted with scripture ; and by it examine what you hear. You must not take all for gospel that sounds like gospel. You may hear Christ and grace, and high strains of grace, oft repeated ; yet this may
not

not be preaching Christ. Advert to the tendency of what you hear. If, while it levels confidence in self-righteousness, it takes us off from the love and practice of sin, and leads to Christ for holiness, as well as for pardon, receive it as the truth; but if it doth not, assuredly the doctrine is unsound. It may soothe imagination, and soften the passions; but it poisons the heart. Take heed how you hear, — that you hear attentively, with an honest purpose, to be instructed, and turned to God, in answer to the design of the word; in order to which, you had need to watch over the subtle workings of the heart, by which you are in danger of being misled to favour or censure doctrines as they agree or disagree with your corrupt taste. The heart of every man, under the influence of sin, is naturally heretical: so that oft, when you censure the doctrine, you ought rather to censure your own heart. The doctrine may be sound and good, and yet, by an unsound heart, be perverted to a bad design. Thus ungodly men turn the Bible-doctrine of grace to licentiousness. Take heed, therefore, that you come to hear with an honest intention to profit. And for this end, consider the order in which you are to take up the Bible-scheme of religion; — that first you have faith to see the truth of revelation, the harmony and glory of the divine perfections, “shining in the face of Christ,” and in the doctrines concerning him; and the infallible cer-

tainty of that life and immortality brought to light by the gospel. Even in natural religion, faith must have the lead. According to mens apprehensions of God, of his perfections, and of the certainty of a future state, they shall be influenced to live virtuously. Till men are strongly persuaded of these truths, cold directions to do this and that, enforced by elegant descriptions of the beauty of virtue, are feeble cords to draw or to hold them to virtue. And until we apprehend God in the light of gospel-grace, until we see the atonement in Christ's blood, with the promise of the Spirit, "to work in us all our works," and, under the humbling conviction of guilt and condemnation, embrace the Saviour as our righteousness and strength, vain are our attempts to mortify corruption in heart, and yield loving obedience to the law. The question, therefore, is injudicious, Whether morality be better than faith? It is as if you should ask, whether walking be better than the life, which puts the feet in motion? or whether the lamp that burns be better than the oil which feeds the flame? There is no life nor real worth in morals without faith, as they neither proceed from a pure heart, nor are directed by a single eye. On the other hand, it is not a living faith, but a fruitless notion, which is not productive of good works. Both are inseparably connected together.

You cannot, therefore, hear too much of the
doctrines

doctrines of grace, nor be too much delighted in hearing them : but give serious attention to their design. Be concerned to feel their virtue and power, in turning you from sin, your favourite sins. Be earnest in prayer for this effect. Judge not of your profiting merely by the pleasure you have in hearing. You may have a natural pleasure in hearing, without any spiritual advantage. Your profit is ever in proportion to your growing hatred of sin, your growing knowledge of, and love to Jesus, and his ways of holiness : “ Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.” — “ Blessed are they who hear and do the word of God.” — “ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” If ye do them not, the gospel is to you “ the favour of death ;” and after all your pleasure and rapture in hearing it, “ you shall die in your sins.”

So far, and too far, I fear, for your patience, have I delivered what I believe to be truth. May the God of truth, and of all grace, bless for our good what of his truth hath been spoken.

CHARGE

CHARGE to the MINISTER.

Reverend and Dear Brother,

THE dispensation of the gospel is committed to you, and you have accepted the momentous trust. Suffer me to lay before you, in a solemn charge, as is usual, “how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God.”

The providence of God has called you to minister his word to this congregation. You are duly ordained and set apart to the work of the ministry. High and honourable is the employment; but it is difficult. Various and weighty are the duties belonging to it; divers and dangerous are the temptations which attend it. For discharging the one, and overcoming the other, a more than ordinary proportion of gifts and graces is necessary.

Before you undertook the arduous trust, you have, I hope, counted the cost, and seen where your strength lay.

Before you devoted yourself to the ministry, for bringing others to God, you have, no doubt, first believed, and given yourself to God, for your own salvation, and have got the aim of your heart directed to his glory.

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To be called by grace, and to have Christ revealed in the heart, is a necessary qualification for preaching to others; but not all that is required. Besides the faith and grace common to all private Christians, one must possess, in a superior degree, the gifts of knowledge and utterance, for being able to teach others.

As you have studied to be furnished with these, you must continue labouring to be enriched with them more and more, “ever following on to know the Lord,” and his way, more perfectly; that as “a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of heaven, you may bring out of your treasure things new and old.”

Labour for a clear view of the mediatory scheme, and its design, “that you may be able to make it manifest to others, as you ought.” Affect not to be wise above what is written. Never venture to declare to others what you have not first clearly conceived in your own mind. The vanity of diving deep into mysteries, or of soaring higher than their strength could carry them, has thrown many into intricacy, obscurity, and error. Be not flat or mean; but be ever plain and clear. Dark involved discourses, rarely, if at all, do good; they perplex, instead of enlightening. True, it is the Spirit of God that enlightens the mind; but ordinarily it is by the fit mean of a perspicuous communication of the truth.

For attaining this gift, give attendance to reading;

ing; and see to make a right choice of books. For direction in this, consult with persons of approved judgement and experience. “Be not wise in your own conceit,” so far as to think you are above the necessity of counsel from other men. It is the most unaccountable vanity and weakness to imagine we need no help from the conference and advice of our brethren.

Be not anxious to read much; but read with care. We become knowing and learned, not so much by turning over many books, as by thinking much, and digesting thoroughly what we read, with intense meditation: “Meditate on these things; so shall your profiting appear to all.”

As to the rule of preaching, never go to the pulpit, but with a sincere intention to do good, to gain souls, to convince, to convert, or to comfort the contrite.

For awakening this pure purpose in your soul, consider and feel the majestic presence of that God in whose name you are to speak, the inestimable worth of immortal souls, the high importance of saving one of them from sin and hell.

For gaining this worthy end, “be diligent to know the state of your flock,”—their sins,—their complaints,—their distresses,—their attainments,—their graces and comforts,—the home language of particular providences. Chuse subjects.

jects of discourse suitable to these. Implore God's direction in the choice of them.* Then study your sermons with care; not so much to embellish and garnish them with the glittering toys of tinkling words, and flowers of rhetoric, for gratifying the false taste, and catching the vain applause of superficial hearers; but, by searching the consciences, to render them profitable. Study to please, but chiefly that you may edify. Exert your strength to find sentiments pertinent, clear, and strong,—to express them in forcible scripture-language, the fittest to alarm and penetrate the heart. Try them first upon your own heart; if they tally with its experience, and rip up its sores, you may expect they will pierce the hearts of others. “As face answers to face in a glass, so does the heart of man to man.” Thus labour to get your sermons first wrought into your own soul. It is a good rule, That, when we study for the salvation of others, we, at the same time, study for our own; urging our hearts to believe, to hope, to love, to exercise the several graces which correspond to the doctrines we deliver: “So shall we be mighty in the scriptures, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

And, knowing in whose name, and whose word you speak,—speak with freedom and boldness,—flatter none,—declare the truth as occasion may require, “whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear:” “be not afraid of their
I faces,”

faces," nor of their words. Say in the noble spirit of the prophet,— "As the Lord liveth, what God has commanded me to speak, that will I speak." At the same time, temper your freedom with prudence and modesty; shewing that your zeal is the flame of love; especially in ministering reproof, which requires the greatest delicacy and caution. By indiscreet forwardness, you exasperate instead of gaining the offender, and get unto yourself a blot. This sometimes will be the effect of reproof, when managed with the most consummate prudence. It was the effect of our Lord's reproof, although he was the wisdom of the Father, and ever acted prudently. Stephen, also, full of the Holy Ghost, ministering reproof with the forgiving meekness of heaven, did only draw upon himself the fury of the enraged multitude, "who were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon him with their teeth." Do you your duty with fidelity and singleness of heart, having all your dependence upon God, striving in prayer for his direction, and for success by his blessing. So preaching and so praying, you may well entertain hope, that your labour shall not be in vain,— that you shall not preach one sermon without some good following upon it.

This painful laborious course you are to continue towards your growing improvement. It is a poor account of a man, still possessing health and vigour, that, for the first few years of his ministry,

stry, he preached well, but is now sensibly fallen off. We must never be at a stand, nor decline; but be ever advancing, and “abounding in the work of the Lord.”

As you are to instruct publicly, so “from house to house,”—punctual, faithful, diligent in every duty;—studying every point, that in none you may appear lame.—Give thyself wholly to the great work of saving souls. Lose no favourable opportunity of doing something in this way.—In visiting the sick, when, by the apprehended approach of death, the patient is disposed to be serious, fail not to improve the advantage this gives of insinuating proper instruction, with gentleness, into his mind. The irrecoverable loss of an opportunity of this kind, through neglect or sloth, must give uneasiness to a reflecting mind.

That you may not be distracted or disheartened in your ministry, see you do not intangle yourself in “the cares of this life.” Some, by grasping too eagerly at the world, have overloaded themselves with debt and cares,—destroyed their peace,—discomposed their minds for study,—choked the good seed in their own hearts,—and lost all heart and spirit for the duties of their sacred charge, to the great prejudice of souls.

For keeping yourself and the church pure, attend strictly to the exercise of discipline, in excluding from Christian privileges the ignorant and profane, whose too easy admission to them, we

are sure, offends God, “profanes the sanctuary,” and “provokes the glory to depart.” Keep such back, till they are instructed, and recovered to a good life. In this you need to exercise prudence. — Be not hasty to publish, and to bring before church-courts, every offence. — If it be private, or known only to a few, try, according to the rules of scripture, and of the church, what may be done with the delinquent by private communing. If the offence be an open scandal, public discipline must be exercised, and censure inflicted, proportioned to the crime.

For giving weight and authority to your sacred ministrations, let your life be blameless, — a life of exemplary sobriety and moderation. Approach not near the borders of immorality, — “abstain from all appearance of evil.” Be not so much as suspected of intemperance.

Let your whole life discover your fear of God, — your fear to offend, — your fear “to hinder the gospel,” — your just concern to “magnify your office.” In things indifferent, please not yourself, but your neighbour for his good, to edification. “Thus walk charitably towards your brother.” Let your whole conduct breathe good will and love to your people. Make it manifest that it is your heart’s desire and prayer to God that they may be saved.

Give proof of the love of God dwelling in you, by being forward to remember the poor, especially

pecially poor saints, Gal. ii. 10. — Manage their funds with discreet œconomy. Find out the indigent. Distribute to their necessities. “As you abound in every thing, in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, and in all diligence, see that you abound in this grace also.”

Let the condescending gentleness and meekness of your Lord adorn your general behaviour, recommend and endear you to all. Be humble, but with dignity; grave, but not surly nor morose. Maintain that just medium, between servile familiarity and forbidding reserve, which secures against contempt, and gains respect.

Be not soon angry, “He who is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.” — Be not apt to kindle into passion upon every slight provocation. This weakness must lessen you in mens esteem. And, when greatly injured, (which may probably happen one time or other), “render not evil for evil,—railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing.” Never bring your private quarrels into the pulpit. Shew, by a ready disposition to forgive, that you seek not revenge, but the offender’s recovery to God; — that you are more affected with the injury as done to God, and to the sinner himself, than as done to you. Thus, by all methods of meek forbearance and kindness, study to gain mens hearts, to overcome their evil with your good. “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all.” At the same time it is necessary, that,
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on occasions, you rebuke sharply and with authority. For the more perfect knowledge of the several duties incumbent upon you, with respect to worship, discipline, and government, consult the scriptures: "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to the word."

This charge I give thee before God, who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that you keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You will be ready to say, — How solemn the charge! — O how high the demand! "And who is sufficient for these things?" — "Be of good courage:" "Your sufficiency is of God; he sends you not a warfare upon your own charges." — Live by faith upon your Lord, and he will bless and prosper you; by his grace strengthening you, you can do all things. Nor be discouraged, although, for a time, no observable success should attend your ministry. This ought to humble us, and to awaken prayer: but not to dishearten or disquiet us, if our hearts reproach us not with negligence and unfaithfulness. — Do you your duty, — trust in the Lord, and be doing good; and for your rejoicing "you shall have the testimony of a good conscience." — "Though Israel should not be gathered, you shall be glorious

ous in the eyes of the Lord, your work shall be with your God." — "Be not then weary of well-doing ; for in due season you shall reap if you faint not." Yea God may comfort your heart, with manifest proofs of your success, before you die ; so that on the confines of eternity you shall exult in the glad prospect of appearing before God, with several of your flock along with you ; of whom you will be bold to say, — Behold me, Lord, and the children thou hast graciously given me !

CHARGE to the PEOPLE.

SUFFER me, before I conclude, to direct a short address to the people of this congregation.

You are now provided with the greatest blessing in time, a gospel-ministry, the chief means appointed of God for bringing men to himself. Be sensible of your mercy, thankful to God for it, and take heed how you improve it.

You have got a minister settled among you without violence to your inclinations. He is of your own chusing. Hence no prejudice, occasioned by intrusion, stands against him : a circumstance which renders you the more inexcusable if you do not profit by him. For what purpose have
you

you called him? Why is he ordained among you? — Do you think, that, because you have called him, he must therefore be your obsequious servant, to flatter your humours, to conform to your wills.—He must study to please you, but only for your good:—if otherwise “he seek to please men, he cannot be the servant of Christ.”

“Let men account of us as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, in whom it is required, that they be found faithful, distributing to every one the portion allotted him by the master, without preferring one to another, doing nothing by partiality.” — The minister’s business is, honestly to declare the truth for bringing you to God.

The character is honourable, and very important: it challenges your esteem and veneration. You have already testified your regard for this man, in judging and chusing him as a fit pastor, to whom you may safely commit the care of your souls. Fall not from your declared respect, but rather grow in it. “He worketh the work of God, and speaks the word of God to you.” He is liable to many temptations to discourage his heart, and weaken his hands in this work. Do not ye add to his discouragement, by your disrespect and coldness of love. “We beseech you, brethren, to know him who laboureth among you, and is over you in the Lord, and to esteem him

him very highly in love, for his work's sake : for he watcheth for your souls as one who must give account ; that he may do it with joy, and not with grief ; for that is unprofitable for you."—Beware of treating him rudely, " he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." The master and the servant's honour are nearly connected together : The injury done to the servant the master resents as done to himself : " Touch not mine anointed, saith the Lord, and do my prophets no harm : he who toucheth them, toucheth the apple of my eye."—In every parish, there are some bold sinners, who, unable to smother their unprovoked spite against the minister, will ever be busy in troubling him : let such tremble at the apostolic commination, " He who troubleth you, shall bear his judgement, whosoever he be."

Be not upon the catch for faults in his conduct : these you will find ; " for we are men of like passions with yourselves." Watch not for his halting, with a malevolent intention to proclaim with exaggeration his every failing, to the prejudice of his character and usefulness. Beware of hurting him with others by dark surmises, nor desert him yourselves for lesser defects in his life or ministrations. We command none, for the sake of order, to hear him who preaches not the truths of the gospel.—The Lord forbids it. " If there come unto you any that brings not this doctrine, receive him not, neither bid him God speed." But see

that ye well understand what the true gospel is ; that ye judge not the matter from the mere sound of words ; and that it is from unfeigned regard to the truth, and not from spite, you withdraw. Sometimes a pretended zeal for the purity of the gospel covers wrath and pride, hatred and rancour ; and often, to be revenged on the minister, men take a sad revenge on themselves, by flying from their mercy. Nor is it obvious that ever any, by thus deserting their respective pastors, improved in their religious temper and life. Give not heed therefore to the solicitations of those whose usual way it is to lie in wait to espy and to publish the faults of others, in order thereby to draw followers after themselves ; and who, by this very practice, are far from evincing that they are innocent and good. “ We beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences, and avoid them : for such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Never come to hear the word, but with a sincere purpose to be instructed. Come not with a captious design to find something to quarrel with. Prepossessed with this dark untoward disposition, the evil spirit that inspires it (though there should be nothing censurable in the discourse) will instruct your wanton imagination to sport with the sound of some expression, to wrest it into a bad sense, greatly

greatly to your own hurt, thereby “making your bands strong.” — Come with a humble mind, a candid pure purpose to profit; and you shall not “be sent empty away.” Should there be some blameable wanderings from the purpose in what you hear, you shall be taught of God, “to refuse the evil, and chuse the good;” to throw away what is naught, and to take up what is pure and wholesome.

Come not merely for entertainment to the ear and fancy, by the splendid eloquence and ingenious art of man, but to hear the word of God for your salvation.

Some, lost to all sense of God’s authority in the word, come to church merely to be entertained by man: they feel not the importance of scripture-truth; but go away, praising or dispraising the speaker; and that is all the fruit of their hearing.

Come to hear the overtures of peace from God, ministered by man; humbly depending upon the Spirit of grace for a willing mind to agree to these overtures: “We pray you,” saith the apostle, “in Christ’s stead, as if God did beseech you by us, be ye reconciled to God.” See you refuse not him who speaks to you from heaven by your minister. Should you be kind to your minister, and reject his message; while you flatter the servant, you despise his master, and the end of the ministry is defeated, — your souls are lost.

Yea, by your neglect and misimprovement of the means of grace, God is provoked to deprive you and your children of them. It is one of the sorest judgements with which God threatens his people, a judgement sorer than famine of bread, “that they should wander from sea to sea, — run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and not find it.” — “While ye have the light, walk in it, lest darkness come upon you;” lest the light of gospel-truth depart, to give place to the darkness of error. And have we not cause to apprehend, from the rapid growth of infidelity, from the unfruitful formality, and from the open disobedience to the gospel by multitudes, who still hold it in profession, that this judgement, in a train of other calamities, is hastening upon us?

As you owe your minister the encouragement of your cordial obedience to the gospel; so are you bound to contribute, every one in his station, toward the comfort of his life, and the success of his ministry; that, with respect to outward circumstances, he be well accommodated; that by no vexing inconvenience he be discouraged and hindered in his work. It is strange to see the backwardness in many parishes to afford what is necessary for the accommodation of the minister; that every trifling expence laid out this way, is given with reluctance. And is a gospel-ministry to be deemed a burden, and not a privilege? Is it not worth laying out some expence in its support?

port ? Who hath ever felt its happy effects, and does not think so ?

Besides, it is required of you more directly to forward his greater usefulness, by instructing your families ; you who are parents, by teaching your children. If the instruction of children be neglected by parents, and wholly left to the minister, his work must go on the more slowly.

Affist him also in the vigorous exercise of discipline. Much you can do in this way, — by detecting the scandalous, — by giving evidence against them, when duly called to do it, — by discountenancing them in their offensive practices and contumacy. If, by continuing your wonted familiarity, ye encourage them in their sins ; if ye screen them on any account whatsoever, you are partakers with them in their sins. You are chargeable with the scandal, the prejudice and hurt to the society, that ensues upon the delinquent's escape from censure. “ Have no fellowship, therefore, with the works of darkness, but rather reprove them ;” that the impure may be separated from the congregation of the upright.

Lastly, Offer up your daily fervent prayers to God for him. It is God's message he brings. Can you love God, and not affectionately wish success to his message ? If it succeed, it must be by the influence of God's own blessing ; and this is obtained ordinarily by prayer. His charge is weighty and laborious. He meets with unceasing
opposition

opposition from the world, and from hell. There is no might in man to withstand their combined force : “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ” “ If God strengthen him not with all might in the inner man,” he must sink under his difficulties : therefore pray for him.

Do it for your own sake. He labours for your souls. He who prays not for his minister, is not likely to profit by him. In short, your spiritual prosperity and his are so conjoined, that they keep pace together. As he prospers and improves, your souls prosper ; as he declines and fails, you are in danger of suffering loss. On your own account, therefore, you need to pray daily, that he may be under God’s continued influence and direction.

By thus assisting him, you are considered as “ his fellow-helpers in the work of the Lord,” as partners in his success. As such, you shall share in his reward, and shine with him in glory.

Thus living, and praying in the Spirit, knit together in love, “ your hearts shall now be comforted by the mutual faith of him and you.” And tho’ you must ere long be separated by death for a time, joyful shall be your meeting in another world, at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. When your pastor shall see you as his children in Christ, “ whom he hath begotten through the gospel,” and you shall see him as your spiritual father, by whose ministry you have been brought
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to Christ, and to glory; who can conceive the vehement flame of love with which your hearts shall then glow one towards another! God grant that such may be the great, the happy effect of this day's solemnity among you. As it is comfortable in its beginning, may it be so in its continuance and end.

And now, Brethren, I commit you and your pastor to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them who are sanctified. *Amen.*

S E R -

S E R M O N II.

The effects of the word entering into the heart.

ROMANS, x. 8.

The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart ; that is the word of faith which we preach.

THE Apostle, in asserting the righteousness of faith, breathes out his soul in ardent desire for the salvation of Israel ; intimating thereby his strong persuasion of the absolute necessity of righteousness by faith as the alone way of salvation. Our Lord peremptorily determines the everlasting state of all men thus : — “ He that believeth, shall be saved ; he that believeth not, shall be damned.” This sentence is decisive and irrevocable.

To seek righteousness in another way, that is, by the works of the law, betrays ignorance both of law and of gospel, of God and of ourselves. The apostle adduces Moses, the giver of the law, in support of the truth of his doctrine, — That righteousness and life come not by the law, but by faith : “ for Moses,” says he, “ describeth the righteousness

righteousness which is of the law, That the man who doth these things shall live by them." By this description, he shews, that righteousness and life cannot be attained by the works of the law; because it is impossible for man, in his present ^{fallen} state, to yield that perfect obedience which the law peremptorily requires. To the righteousness of the law he opposes the righteousness which is of faith, and urges it also by the authority of Moses. The place he refers to is Deut. xxx. 11.—14. The apostle, in delivering the mind of Moses, varies his words, so as to accommodate them to the new dispensation of grace under the gospel. Moses mentions the commandment or word of God only, by which we are to understand the then revelation of God's mind in general; the substance, the life and soul of which was the Messiah promised to come, in whom the people were to believe for life, through him.

It was not necessary, for their living by him, that they should see him actually present before their eyes. God's promise, that he should be manifested in his time, was a sufficient foundation for faith to all the Old-Testament saints. And indeed the leading command, under both dispensations, is, to give entire credit to the testimony of God respecting the Messiah. Accordingly the apostle accommodates the words of Moses to Christ already come in the flesh; and shews, that our righteousness, in the sight of God,

is by faith in him, the Lord our surety, who, being called of God, undertook our cause, and, by becoming obedient unto death, accomplished our redemption. The difficulty supposed to arise against this doctrine, he expresses thus: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above? or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring Christ again from the dead." This speaks the perplexity of man's thoughts, upon hearing a matter which reason is so unable to comprehend. That God should send his divine Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, to die a sacrifice for the sins of men; — that, after he had, to the satisfaction of justice, finished the work given him to do, God should have raised him from the dead, and given him glory; — and that, through faith and trust in the sole merit of his obedience, guilty man should stand justified in the sight of God; — all this, says the unbelieving heart, is quite remote from ordinary observation. No eye hath seen, no ear hath ever heard, any thing similar to it. — What evidence have I of its truth? Who will shew Jesus to my senses? If I see him not with these eyes, I will not believe. Thus unbelief insists for the evidence of sense. Every one would be an eye-witness of Christ's miracles, of his death and resurrection, else he will not believe. This ever has been the perverse demand
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of infidelity. The Jews required a sign, while they rejected signs which ought to have satisfied them. An evil and adulterous generation continues to make the same unreasonable demand, saying with the Jews, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." Why, say they, did not Jesus, after his resurrection, shew himself openly before all the people? But God, instead of granting such satisfaction as mens perverse humour insists for, affords another kind of evidence, more consonant to his wisdom, and equally, if not more, satisfactory to the minds of all unprejudiced inquirers after truth, i. e. the testimony of chosen witnesses, having God's seal appended to their testimony. This testimony carries sufficient evidence to induce our faith, though with our eyes we see not the Lord. Nor is it necessary for believing, that we should see him. We have a surer ground for faith, the testimony of the word; a ground so reasonable and sure, that, if we believe not Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, neither would we believe should one rise from the dead. The Lord would have his disciples believe upon the testimony of scripture, although he had not appeared to them after his resurrection: Luke xxiv. 25. "Then said he to them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses,

and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Accordingly he says in another place, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed;" that is, who shall believe on me through the word preached by my servants, tho' they see me not with their bodily eyes. "Say not then, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above)," &c. "The word is nigh thee;" it is published to the world; "it is in thy mouth." You are taught it with such plainness of speech, that you may understand it; and if, in hearing it, you understand it *so* as to believe it in your heart, and confess it with your mouth, you have the faith that justifies. When the apostle adds, the "word of faith which we preach," he means, that the word which he and the other apostles preached, was, for substance, the same that Moses and the prophets delivered as the object of faith,—the word, not of the law, or covenant of works, but of the gospel, or the new covenant, written by grace upon the heart; as appears from the whole of Deut. xxx. particularly ver. 6. compared with Jer. xxxi. 31. 32. 33. It was the same scheme of justification by faith that Moses and the prophets taught, which Paul and the other apostles preached, Heb. iv. 2. It is the same gospel, with different degrees of light, that obtains under both Testaments.

Having

Having said so much for explication, I shall, in discoursing farther from the words,

1. Shew, that saving faith terminates upon the testimony of God in the word; and,

2. Explain what that intimate nearness of the word in the heart is, which rises to this faith; and,

3. Lastly, apply the subject.

I. I AM to shew, that faith terminates upon the testimony of God in the word.

By the word I understand the revelation of scripture in general, designed *the law and the testimony*, II. viii. 20. This word is the object of faith; particularly as it points to Christ, the centre in which all the lines of scripture meet.

The capital truths concerning him, which faith respects, are these: — That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh; — That he died for our sins, according to the scriptures; — and, That he was buried; — and, That he rose again the third day. Take along with these facts the promise of God, that whosoever believeth in him, or looks to him for redemption, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. In the verse that follows my text, the apostle expresses the object of faith more generally, thus: “ If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

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This is a summary of the gospel, comprehending the several important truths connected with the death and resurrection of Christ.

Upon the testimony of God, in this word, terminates that faith which is required for salvation; or, faith respects and rests upon the written word as the word of God, and the alone sure ground of trust for salvation. So it stands contradistinguished from the belief that builds, 1. upon the natural conclusions of fallible human reason; 2. upon visions and revelations; or, 3. upon the mere authority of human testimony.

1. True faith respects, as the ground of its trust, the truth of God's word revealed in scripture. Faith, once satisfied of the divine authority of scripture, admits as divine truth whatever it finds there, although reason cannot fully account for it. The pride of man leads him to call every thing to the bar of his reason; to admit nothing for truth, but what it can fairly account for, in its nature and design. How can this or that be true? says proud man; it tallies not with my reason. Hence many wise and learned, (after having allowed the truth of revelation), not submitting their understanding to the wisdom and authority of scripture, but measuring all truth by their own natural notions and observations of things, have explained away the true genuine sense of scripture, wresting it, by forced and unnatural glosses, to speak their own preconceived opinions. Things,
say

say they, must not be taken in their plain literal meaning, but in the sense of our reason. And what are these ingenious reasonings by which men fix upon scripture a sense foreign to what the common acceptance of words suggests? What are they but the airy imaginations of men, which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God?

If we, who acknowledge the divine authority of scripture, will reason for persuading men of their genuine sense, let us reason from scripture, as our Lord did with the Jews, and as was Paul's manner in testifying the kingdom of God. For persuading the Jews concerning Christ, he reasoned out of the scriptures, opening, and alledging, out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, "that Christ must needs have suffered, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light to the people, and to the Gentiles; and that this Jesus whom he preached was the Christ."

The use to be made of reasoning in divine matters is this: After having confirmed, by it, the truth of revelation in general, we should then, by carefully comparing scripture with scripture, ascertain the mind of the Spirit in them, which faith respects and rests upon.—It does so, 2. in contradistinction to the belief that is built upon visions and revelations; in which I include the evidence of signs and wonders which men wantonly require,

require, according to their own humour, while they reject those set before them, equally good and satisfying to honest unprejudiced minds. Thus the Pharisees, after the Lord had performed before their eyes the most real miracles, at once expressive of his divine power and goodness, say, tempting him, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." This unreasonable, arbitrary demand, the Lord denies; well knowing, that it proceeded not from a sincere desire to be satisfied of the truth, but from perverse unbelief and malice; and that, if he had indulged their desire, they still would have rejected these signs wrought at their own request, and fallen upon a way of discrediting them, together with his other miracles. A striking instance of this untoward spirit we have in the Jewish rulers, who after they had acknowledged that a notable miracle, manifest to all Jerusalem, had been done by the apostles; yet, from inveterate obstinacy, straitly charged them not to speak any more in the name of Jesus.

Thus men under the influence of a perverse infidel heart, pretend they cannot believe for want of evidence. They quarrel with the evidence provided in the wisdom of God, for gaining belief; and, in its place, propose another, after their fancy, more satisfactory. Why, say they, did not Jesus shew himself openly to all the people, after his resurrection? And why not to all nations, — to all generations, — and to every individual

dual in every age? Such are the vain imaginations of men, in opposition to the wisdom of God. They would ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down, for satisfaction to mens senses; though the evidence, as it now stands, is undoubtedly the best, and the fittest to convince and satisfy. It comes recommended by the amplest testimony; yea more, it is written so legibly upon the face of scripture, that it leaves all the world without excuse in not receiving it.

The evidence is sufficient to satisfy every diligent honest-hearted inquirer. Thousands, the wisest and best of mankind, acquiesce in it without complaint; and more than satisfies such candid unprejudiced minds, is unworthy of God to grant in compliance with the licentious humour of unreasonable men. And I ever thought it was doing too much honour, and paying too high a compliment to the vanity of infidelity, to employ so much laboured argument in answering its perverse frivolous cavils, which, instead of curing, has rather fostered and inflamed its arrogance. Would men give that attention to the evidence brought in proof of scripture, which the ordinary occurrences in life require for belief; would they, with sober serious minds, look into the word, they could not fail of seeing such evidence of its truth, as might suffice to convince them that it is the word of God. I add,

That faith finds, in the word, sure ground to

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rest upon, without the aid of visions and revelations, or sudden extraordinary manifestations. The dark unbelief of the heart insists for these additional grounds of faith, as if there were no power to believe without them. Thus, serious souls may be long bewildered by unbelief, and misled by it to pray for bright manifestations, the evidence of sense, in order to their believing, and thereby be diverted from the course proper for obtaining faith, namely, reading, hearing, and meditating upon the word, accompanied with prayer for the Spirit to open the understanding to understand and believe the scriptures.

There is a certain manifestation of the truth, and of Christ, to the heart, by the Spirit, necessary to believing; and, because of this spiritual discernment of God's testimony and glory in the word, faith, which comes by hearing, is justly termed *seeing*. But this spiritual sight, which is equivalent to the sensible evidence which unbelief craves, differs from these imaginary visions, as these again differ from that signal manifestation of the divine glory with which God is pleased, sometimes, to introduce faith, and which, on occasions, is his peculiar sovereign vouchsafement to his people. But such manifestation is ordinarily by means of the word: nor is it essential to the being of faith, or necessary to its formation, it being rather an effect or concomitant of faith. Both are expressed by Job, thus: — “I have heard of thee by
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the hearing of the ear,"—that is faith, "But now mine eyes see thee." This expresses a signal manifestation, succeeding, for his comfort and establishment, to long and great distress: but both the one and the other come by the word of God, upon which faith fastens, while it perceives in it the testimony of God.

Thus, 3. True faith respects the testimony of God in the word, in contradistinction to that human faith which stands upon the authority of the church, and of human testimony alone.

It may be asked, —Is human testimony to be set aside, as having no place in the reasons of our faith? The answer is, That there is a rational belief of the truth of scripture, which is introductory to divine faith. This rational belief is founded upon human testimony, the strongest that ever gained credit to any matter of fact. A great number of the most respectable characters attest the facts narrated in scripture, sealing their testimony with their blood. Many who saw the facts with their eyes, confirmed them to others, with signs, and wonders, and divers miracles of the Holy Ghost; a sort of confirmation to them equivalent to the evidence of sight. The facts and oracles so confirmed, they put upon record, submitting them to the severest scrutiny of those who had the fairest access to know their truth. Thousands, upon the most convincing evidence, receive them as undoubted truths: they deliver them to

their children, and these to theirs, as they received them from their fathers;—one generation thus transmitting them to another, down to our own time; so that “a great cloud of witnesses, compassing us about, in every age, recommends the scriptures to our belief: and not to receive them as real matters of fact, upon such credible testimony, is a petulant outrage against the common sense and reason of mankind; to pervert which, is all that some achieve by their philosophy.

But, though we admit the truth of scripture upon the testimony of man, yet our faith “that brings salvation,” is not therefore built upon man’s authority. This natural faith, which yields to external evidence, comes not up to divine faith; it is only subservient to it, in bringing to our view and ears the word of God, in which divine faith sees the testimony of God as the sole ground of its trust and rest. The testimony of the church says, as Philip said to Nathaniel,—“We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth: come and see.” Nathaniel having come, and heard Jesus himself speak, he says, believing, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.” Invited by what our fathers have told us, we repair to the sanctuary, and as we have heard, so we see, with our own eyes, in the city of the Lord of hosts. Thus our faith is built upon the
infallible

infallible testimony of God in the word. We hear it published by man, but it is upon the witness of God we receive it. As the Apostle says, 1 Thess. ii. 13. "For this cause thank we God, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." Ye heard it from us, but ye received it, not upon our testimony, but upon that of God himself. Upon the testimony of man we so far believe as to come and see, or to attend upon the ordinances of religion, for hearing God himself speaking to our hearts in the word. As the Samaritans, upon the woman's report, believed, and came themselves to Jesus, and then said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." It is observable, that our Lord chides not his disciples so much for mistrusting the women who brought them intelligence of his resurrection, as for questioning the authority of God in scripture:—"O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." They testified beforehand that the Messiah must die and rise again. Upon this testimony of the spirit of prophecy, the disciples ought readily to have believed, that he, who, by evident signs, proved himself to be the promised Messiah, was risen from the dead:—"He that hath ears to hear,

hear, let him hear what the Spirit in the word saith to the churches." This is divine faith that hears God himself speaking in the word, and receives it upon his testimony.

As infidelity draws its objections to revelation from its intrinsic characters, so divine faith, seeing the characters of divinity written upon the face of scripture, says, Of a truth God speaks in this book.

Thousands have this divine faith, who never gave themselves much trouble to enquire into the nature of moral evidence, or the proof from human testimony of the truth of revelation; but, upon general thinking, perceive the sum and strength of the argument drawn out by the learned, in a long train of reasoning, and thence readily conclude, in compliance with the obvious dictates of unbiassed reason, that the concurring testimonies of so many, and of such witnesses, cannot be false, but must be true. Most justly taking this for granted, they take up the Bible, and read;—they resort to the sanctuary to see and to hear; and, by the blessing of God, their understandings open to understand the scriptures,—to perceive the truth and authority of God in them; and they instantly conclude,—“Of a truth this is God’s testimony established in Jacob,—his law appointed in Israel.” Thus the unlearned are led easily to believe with rational assurance; whereas many who have bestowed much labour in examining
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the arguments of the learned for and against the scriptures, whose candour and good sense yield to the commanding evidence of their truth, and who, upon solid principles of reason, are firmly settled in the belief of them, do rest there, never rising to the spiritual discernment of divine faith, which sees "the greater witness of God" in the word, which submits to its authority, and ventures the important concerns of eternity upon the faithful word of his grace. — This leads,

II. To explain what that intimate nearness of the word in the heart is, which rises to this faith.

It may not be improper to observe, that the particulars to be mentioned upon this head, are all the effects of the gracious agency of the Spirit of God, opening the ear to hear the word with a feeling of its divine authority; for, says the Apostle, 1 Theff. i. 5. "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Preach the word who will, should an angel from heaven be the preacher, if the Spirit of God, along with his ministry, preach not the word home to our spirits, we never will believe for salvation. While Peter preached concerning Christ, the people who heard, believed his words, because the Holy Ghost fell upon them, Acts x. "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God."

Now the faith which the Spirit produceth by
means

means of the word, as it is expressed by the word's being near in the heart, imports,

1. That the word so enters the understanding, that we not only understand the doctrines it delivers, but perceive that they are of God. "Lo now, say the disciples to Christ, speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. — Now we are sure that thou knowest all things. — By this we believe that thou camest forth from God." If the word be heard, and not understood; or should the letter of it be understood, and the word not perceived to be of God, it is far removed from our hearts: even when we hear it with understanding, it is to us as if it were beyond seas, or locked up in heaven. Such is the exalted understanding of the poor and illiterate, above others, in hearing the gospel, that they perceive it to be the word of God, and estimate their profit by it, only so far as it comes to them with this evidence. How comes it to pass that they, in true wisdom, thus rise above many learned? how, but by the demonstration of the Spirit, revealing to babes the things which are hid from the wise and prudent, and from the princes of the world?

The fit mean, subordinate to this ministration of the Spirit, is plainness of speech, conformable to scripture-language. "We speak wisdom, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." The scripture needs no aid
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from the flowers of human rhetoric, either for informing the judgement, or for affecting the heart. The felt authority of God gives the simple words of scripture a dignity and majesty powerful to awe the heart. — It imports,

2. That God himself, or the image of his glory, is near with the word in the heart. The word, by the Spirit, comes with an affecting representation of the glorious objects it declares, both of the terrors of the law, and of the comforts of the gospel; the one designed, “the ministration of condemnation;” the other, “the ministration of righteousness.” As the Spirit is pleased to apply the one or the other, God is perceived, really speaking, by the word, in the heart, as Job perceived him speaking in majesty to his soul. “My people, (says God by the prophet), shall know my name, — they shall know in that day, that I am he that doth speak, behold it is I.”

The truths are then perceived, both in their reality, and in their glory. They are perceived in their reality and infallible certainty. These, says the enlightened soul, are the true sayings of God, and not the cunningly-devised fables of men. They are to me as certain as if I heard God proclaiming them, with an audible voice, from the excellent glory. If the Spirit minister the law, its terrors are as sensibly felt, as if Sinai, all on fire, presented itself to our view. If he minister the gospel, Christ is seen “evidently set forth cruci-

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fied before our eyes." And as they are perceived in their reality, so likewise in their glory; as it is written, "They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." "This beginning of miracles, (says the evangelist), did Jesus in Cana of Gallilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him." As the word declares, the heart perceives a wonderful glory in the divine person of Christ, in his death and righteousness, in his resurrection and second coming; — that these glorious objects are near; — that Christ and his righteousness are near: "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness, I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off." As near as the word is in the heart, so near is Christ, for the heart to take hold of him, and of his righteousness, the word being the vehicle in which this treasure is presented to it. Also, that his second coming is nigh: — That this solemn event, as announced in scripture, shall surely and shortly come to pass: the certainty and solemnity of the event, (though yet at the distance of many years), making a thousand years, in the eye of faith, to be as one day. — The expression further imports,

3. That faith perceives the word, and the glorious objects it reveals, as matters which nearly concern one's self, — that the word is sent to him in particular, as if God addressed him by name: — "Thou art the man:" — "Gird up thy loins now

like a man ; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me."

The scripture uses to address the church in general, in such a manner as calls the attention of every individual to the message, as directed to himself, *Is. xliii. 1.* "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. *ch. xliv. 21. 22.* Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant; I have formed thee, thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me: I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."—As Jesus said to Philip, and to others, so the word ever says, in Christ's name, when it comes near to the heart,—"Follow thou me;" "Believe thou in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved."

When the word comes thus near to the heart, the effects are,

1. A sudden alarm, especially if it find us secure in sin. Then a voice within us saith, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, that thou perish not."—"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The sinner, starting, awakes, and finds himself to have been as one asleep upon the top of a mast, ready to perish; and wonders he has so long escaped. Justly may he now

take up the words of Eliphaz, Job iv. 12. "Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake." In view of the holy majesty of God, he answers the description in Isaiah, 57th and 66th chapters. — a poor, humble, contrite sinner, trembling at the word. Nor is it only the glory of God in the ministration of condemnation, but in the ministration of righteousness also, that hath this effect.

The word having thus got within a man, and roused conscience from its slumber, it finds him employment for saving his soul. The concern and cry now, is not, "What shall I eat and drink?" but, "What shall I do to be saved?" Sitting alone, pensive and sad, he meditates how to escape from impending danger to the city of refuge: "The captive exile hasteneth, that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit." While the word and Spirit keep without the heart, men are fearless and secure in sin, caring only for the things of this life.

A 2d effect of the word of God's grace entering into the heart, is wonder, amidst doubting, at the condescension of divine grace. Surprised with the appearance of favour not looked for, the sinner says, Can this be a message from God to me? Whence is it to me, a froward rebel, that God should send his word, yea come himself near,

near, and speak so kindly, in the word, to my heart? Methinks I hear his voice, saying, "Open to me, arise, and come away." Upon which the soul, filled with admiration and gratitude, rises without delay, leaves all, and goes after him. In that day "his sheep hear his voice;" and hearing, they easily let go their idols, which held them captive. They dismiss them with indignation, and follow Jesus; their spirits breathing, in ardent desire, "O that we knew where we might find him, and see more of his glory!"

The solicitous spirit of prayer now kindles in the heart. When Saul saw the Lord, and heard his voice, perceiving it at his heart, the next thing we hear of him is, "Behold! he prayeth." Faith and prayer are so nearly allied, that faith is expressed, at the 13th verse of this chapter, by *calling* upon the name of the Lord: "And whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved."

A 3d effect of the word, near in the heart, is trust in God, in answer to the word, and the design of its promulgation. The word directed to the heart by the Spirit of God, "causes it to hope and trust in it." The foundation of trust is brought near by the word: "I bring near my righteousness." This relieves and raises the soul sinking in despair, through fear of the curse, to a lively hope: "Here," says the revived heart of the contrite one, "I find firm ground to build upon. For my ample security, I have God's promise

mise to trust to. Be it unto me according to his word; and there shall be a performance of what he hath spoken."

Some, in hearing, rise to desire and joy, who never reach a settled trust in the word; and therefore fall off. Their desire and joy, not rooted in true faith, fade and die. The spirit of prayer dies in them. Unsettled and wavering in their hope, and not finding with Christ "the words of eternal life," they go back, and walk with him no more.

The 4th effect is, satisfaction, contentment, and rest, in God. The word near, in the heart, says, that it has penetrated into the inmost affection of the soul, and gained the ascendant over all other objects in the heart; — that it fills and entertains it abundantly. Upon which the soul, exulting, says, — "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! sweeter than honey to my mouth! I rejoice in it as one that hath found great spoil. Yea, the law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver." Delighted and satisfied with this heavenly manna, the heart conceives a distaste at the gross pleasures of sense, and dismisses them with abhorrence: "What have I to do any more with these defiling idols? Too long have I been their slave." Rejoicing also in having found the pearl of great price, the soul at times bursts forth in grateful praises: "In Zion, comforted by the Lord, is found joy and gladness,

gladness, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." When "the Lord's Anointed preaches good tidings to the meek, and proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord," the redeemed captive sings,— "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." This joyful frame is not uniformly permanent. The saint, after he is "lifted up," is often "cast down again." His ordinary lot is to pass through vicissitudes of day and night, of joy and sadness; although the ground of his rejoicing in the covenant, and the spring of it in the heart, remain invariably the same.

The 5th effect is, confession of Christ, and of his truth, with boldness, firmness, and constancy. Experience of the power and comfort of the word so recommend and endear Christ and his truth to the heart, that we will not be ashamed nor afraid to confess them before men: "I will speak of thy testimonies," says David, "before kings, and will not be ashamed. Princes have persecuted me without a cause; but my heart standeth in awe of thy word." He adds, "I will rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." Both fear of, and delight in the word of God, kept him steadfast in his adherence to it. The disciples, finding the words of eternal life with Jesus, are bold.

bold to confess him in face of the terrors of the world.

I observe, lastly, That the word having thus got near the heart, ever afterwards maintains its possession : having gained the supreme affection of the heart to God, and its trust in him, it never loses its effect in the soul, but “lives and abides for ever,” within us, in its virtue and efficacy.

Once “begotten of this incorruptible seed,” we ever preserve the affection of God’s children ; for the word of the Lord endures for ever, so as to keep up the prevailing desire of the soul towards God, and its honest purpose to follow him. With the disciples, it answers every temptation to forsake him, “To whom shall I go ? Lord, thou hast the words of eternal life.—Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever ; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.—I have inclined my heart to observe thy statutes to the end ; I will never forget them ; for by them thou hast quickened me.”

Thus have I endeavoured to put together the thoughts suggested to me by the text ; and, after my best care to explain its import, I am sensible it is but an imperfect view I have given of it ; and that the operation of faith upon the word near, in the heart, still remains a mystery, not only to unbelievers, but in part to believers themselves. To the blind unbeliever no words can convey a
clear

clear idea of this “hidden manna ;” it is known only to him who receives it. To the right understanding of this matter, the experimental knowledge of the truth, in hearing and learning of the Father of lights, is necessary. If, by this divine teaching, we rise not to a feeling persuasion of the truth, our knowledge, even of the scriptures, our most extensive critical knowledge of their contents, instead of profiting us, will only heighten our condemnation. My confidence in the truth of what I have advanced, is, that all is supported by scripture, and delivered mostly in the words of scripture.

III. INDULGE me a few minutes longer, while, in some inferences, I apply the subject. And,

1. Behold, with adoring wonder, the engaging grace of God to us the guilty sons of men, that, when the curse of his violated law had excluded us from life, he should have opened for us an entrance into life and glory, in another way, (marvellous indeed in the eyes of the whole intelligent creation), i. e. through the righteousness and death of his only-begotten Son, “made flesh, and set forth to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood ;” — a way highly honourable to God, plain and easy to us. By the satisfaction of his Son’s obedience to the law, in our room, God’s honour is well secured. The way of faith in his blood, rendered necessary for our salvation by
O him,

him, (though impracticable by the mere exertion of our natural powers), is become easy by his grace, which with power works it in us. And however God may have a peculiar favour for some, there is, notwithstanding, in the incarnate crucified Son of God, hope set before every sinner who hears the gospel, that he shall, not only be saved in believing, but that, by humble, persevering, diligent attendance upon the several institutions of religion, he may obtain grace to draw his heart by faith to Christ, and so rise to life, to favour and glory, for the everlasting honour of God's sovereign rich grace, through the infinitely meritorious righteousness of his divine Son.

2. See also the kindness of his grace, its tender care for our safety and comfort, in giving us the word, his own infallible word, put on record in scripture, as a ground of hope, as the guide of our life, and our security against deception. How affecting is the condescension of his grace, in taking this method of settling a correspondence between him and our spirits, by the written word; thereby to certify us, that when the word comes with efficacy upon our hearts, it is he himself, our Redeemer-God, that communes with us. Whatever spiritual light or life, whatever reproof, comfort, or direction, comes by the word, we may be sure it is from God,—the suggestion of his Spirit.

By the touchstone of the written word, you
may

may try the spirits, and discover them ; so that, if you are not inattentive, and “willingly ignorant,” you cannot be deceived. You have been in fears often ; as often have you been relieved by the word, your counsellor and comforter. In relying upon its faithfulness, you may be as confident that it will never deceive you, as that God cannot lie. O value the scriptures, as you do your souls. Value them as a light shining in a dark place,—the lamp by which God guides your steps,—the medium by which he silently speaks to your hearts,—the manna with which he feeds you in the desert,—the sword with which he guards your souls, and wounds your enemies, with which he wounds, and heals you again,—the staff given to support you, till you have got through the dark valley of death to the promised land. O how destitute of wisdom, of counsel, and of comfort, are they who despise the word of God ! Of what treasure do they rob themselves who slight its ordinances ! In musing seriously upon this subject, one must be struck with the danger of neglecting to read and hear the word, as by it God speaks to the heart of man, instructs and forms it into a divine temper. Go, in contempt, out of the reach of hearing it, and you are never like to hear from God, till he speak to you in wrath. From this also,

3. We infer, that the preaching and hearing of the word are of the most serious and awful concern. God is peculiarly near in the word.

In it he addresses men by his servants. How dreadful is this place ! It is the house of God. Know ye, that it is by his authority we are here assembled. It concerns us who minister, to take heed that what we deliver be the evident truth of God. It equally concerns you who hear, to take heed how ye hear, that it be “with reverence and godly fear.” “O worship the Lord in the beauties of holiness ! Fear before him, all ye people. Holiness becometh his house for ever. He is to be feared of all who are about him.”

Therefore, in hearing, be attentive, with serious concern, to hear God’s voice in the word,—to feel it in its power. Man may speak with entertainment to your understanding ; he may speak to your fancy, and put it in a glow : but it is God only that can pierce and overcome the heart. Who are men, but ministers by whom you believe ? You may be greatly pleased, you may be affected to ravishment and wonder, in hearing man ; but if you hear not, if you regard not, a greater than man, in the word ministered by man, you still remain in your unbelief and sins. Multitudes wondered at the gracious words which dropped from Christ’s lips, and said, “Never man spake like this man,” who yet believed not, but perished in their sins. In hearing, therefore, be attentive to perceive God’s voice. Christ may be “knocking at the door of your heart,”

heart," and you, through inattention and sloth, may not perceive him; as young Samuel mistook the Lord's call, though thrice repeated, for the voice of man: "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet we perceive it not." This listless inattention and sluggish neglect may provoke the Spirit to withdraw; that when you seek him, you shall not find him; when you call, he will give you no answer.

4. If it be asked, (as it will by a serious doubting soul), How may I know whether God has ever spoken, in the word, with energy, to my heart?

To this I answer, That if, at any time, God has, from peculiar favour, directed the word to your heart, then, by it, the secrets of your heart were made manifest;—it hath told you all that ever you did;—it has imbittered sin to you.—It has recommended Christ to your esteem and love, and warmed your heart with desire after him. While the minister opened to you the scriptures concerning him, did not your heart burn with ardent affection towards him? O that I could call this Jesus my friend! he is the chief among ten thousand.—The word hath endeared itself to your heart; so that your chief delight is now in the sacred volume, and in the public ordinances, the lovely tabernacles of God's
grace,

grace, where he communes with his people, as from between the cherubims.

5. Have you, in reading or hearing the word, felt the effects just now mentioned produced by it in your soul. If you have, it becomes you to be thankful, and, with humble gratitude, to adore the distinguishing grace of God, in his kindness towards you. Many, by nature, in like forlorn circumstances with you, and not less deserving of favour, “he lets alone,” suffering them, without rebuke, to follow the course of the world, and of their own corrupt hearts. But, as the prophet expresses it, “when he passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, destitute, helpless, perishing,” then, compassionating your misery, he said, “Live.” After he had brought down your heart with fear and grief, he sent his word and healed you. By good and comfortable words he allured and drew your heart to Christ. The impression made by his love still remains, “as a nail fastened in a sure place.” You may complain that it is not with you now as it was in the days of youth; but, still, the desire of your soul towards him is so kept up that you cannot turn away from him to other comforters. From this know your election of God,—know that he loves you. Regard the message of grace sent into your heart as an olive-branch brought you in token of his covenant of peace with you,—that, as with growing desire you
remember

remember him, so “he remembers you with the favour he bears unto his people;”—that he will bring you out of all your tribulations into Immanuel’s land, where, in fulfilment of your heart’s desire, you shall see the King in all his beauty and glory. With humble adoring thankfulness say, Why this grace to me more than to others? Was it in the diligent use of means, by being instant in prayer, you obtained deliverance and comfort? And what was it that inclined your heart to this diligence? what, but the secret preventing grace of God, without your knowledge of it? By the light of that grace, now bestowed upon you, you will be taught to acknowledge this, that after all your diligence in duty, in fastings and prayers, it was sovereign grace alone that saved you.

Let his unmerited distinguishing love to you kindle your love to him, and keep it ever alive. Let what he has already said to you, and done for you, encourage your trust in him for more, according to his promise. — Look for the second coming of Christ, and wait for him, joyful in hope. When pressed with straits, when perplexed with any of the cross accidents of life, let this glorious event come in contemplation for your relief; and wait upon the Lord continually, in all commanded duties, for the continued provision necessary on the way to your heavenly Father’s everlasting habitation.

I conclude with a short address to you who never heard God in his word. How pitiable is your case! Amidst plenty you are in want. You sit here “like the heath in the desert, and see not when good cometh.”—In a fruitful land, you are “as one inhabiting the parched places of the wilderness.” God is near in this ministry, but far from you,—far from your sense and feeling. Your ears are sealed, you hear him not. This and that poor man cries, God looks to him, and speaks comfort to his heart, that delivers him from his fears: but he looks upon you afar off. You are deaf to his calls;—he is silent to you, as to one left by him to descend into the pit.—Does it not affect you to be thus forgotten, as it were, and despised of God? Does it not move your serious concern, to think, (if you think at all), that, when he warns, reproves, and comforts others, he should leave you to sleep secure in the chains of your lusts?—Awake, and call upon God, that you perish not. Pray, that his Spirit may fix your attention, and “open your heart to hearken to the things that are spoken by his servants in his name.” Often and long has God “stood at the door and knocked,” and as often have his kind and generous offers been rejected. This continued froward neglect of the invitations of grace have so estranged God from you, and you from him, and from sacred things,
that

that you have not now the feeling of either in your conscience, which once you had. — Reflect, and be grieved at this ; but give not way to despair, so far as to conclude in your heart there is now no hope for you in God. — To day, if you hear his voice, harden not your heart, either through presumption or despair. You have deeply corrupted your ways, “ yet return unto me, saith the Lord.” The invitation is continued. — “ Hearken, I bring near my righteousness, — it shall not be far off ; hear, and your soul shall live ; — incline your ear, and come unto me, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant.” For animating your drooping fainting soul to hope, “ consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Jesus Christ.” In contemplation of his truly divine person and character, expostulate thus with yourself, — “ Is there not in the blood of that divine person, which is said to cleanse from all sin, — is there not in it sufficient virtue to cleanse me from the enormous guilt of my manifold sins ? is not the arm of him who is the Almighty God, powerful to subdue and root out my inveterate corruptions ? shall I, by distrust of this, in contradiction to express testimony of scripture, greatly augment my guilt, by making the God of truth a liar ? — God forbid.” By such communing with one’s self, God operates in the conscience and heart.

In order to your recovery to God, by his grace, I offer the following advices,

1. That (as your own conscience admonishes) “you abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul:” preserve your heart, as much as possibly you can, from further corruption by unmanly indulgence to the sordid pleasures of sense. With the heart man believes and receives the truth. A sensual heart is, and must be, a blind unbelieving heart; it being gross, and incapable of forming any just conception of the nature of God, and spiritual things.—The most invincible obstruction to the entrance of the word of faith, is the indulged enmity of the carnal mind.

2. Be habitually importunate with God in prayer. Wait upon God continually in his ordinances. Never wilfully omit one opportunity of attending upon the public ministry of the word. “Blessed is the man that heareth me, saith the wisdom of God, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my door.” So doing, you bid fair for obtaining wisdom, and eternal life. *Amen.*

S E R -

S E R M O N III.

On the Christian's freedom by Christ.

J O H N, viii. 36.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

P A R T I.

THE desire of liberty is essential to the constitution of human nature. To be free is regarded as the highest privilege of life, without which all other enjoyments lose much of their relish. But though liberty be the object of universal desire, yet, for want of consideration, the nature of it is fatally mistaken by many: they do not perceive, that true happiness has its residence within the man, and results from the state and temper of his soul; in consequence of which they frequently dream that they are possessed of freedom, while in reality they are held in the most ignominious bondage.

Some lay claim to liberty as their birthright, an hereditary appendage of those outward distinctions which exalt them above others. They can boast of their descent from an illustrious race of ancestors, of splendid titles, of wealth and honour,

of a distinguished rank in church and state, of power and authority over a numerous train of obsequious vassals. They can to say to one "Come, and he cometh; and to another, Go, and he goeth." They have what their hearts desire: they pursue their pleasures without control; and now they say, Are we not free? But while they thus boast of their fancied liberty, they are the abject slaves of corruption. All within is disorder and wild confusion: the just subordination of the several powers of the soul is subverted: the sensitive part of man domineering over the rational, to the destruction of liberty and self-enjoyment. As the civil liberty of a people consists in being governed according to established laws for the good of the whole, so the true freedom of man is to have power over his own spirit, by subjecting the inferior appetites, according to the law of his creation, to the jurisdiction of reason and conscience.

This self-government once lost, liberty is no more the privilege of man. Hence the virtuous servant is free, and the libertine master a slave; the prisoner is loosed from his bonds, and the jailor held in fetters. Who does not see Paul enjoying the truest liberty, when he uttered these words, "For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain?" and who can figure slaves more ignominious than his accusers, zealots under the dominion

dominion of impetuous lusts, led captive by the devil at his pleasure?

What a benevolent free spirit doth the great apostle breathe, in his reply to King Agrippa! “Would to God, that not only thou, but all who hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds?”

Let it now be observed, that the Jews, with whom Jesus was reasoning concerning the liberty to which the text refers, could not digest his account of it: on the contrary, though they received him as a prophet from God, yet they claimed their liberty, and all the privileges belonging to the peculiar people of God, on account of their natural relation to Abraham: “We be Abraham’s seed,” say they, “and were never in bondage to any man.” To rectify their mistake, our Lord tells them, here, and in other places of sacred writ, that no man, of whatever nation, whether Jew or Gentile, who did not believe on him as the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world, could claim, or enjoy, the liberty of the sons of God; that without this faith, tho’ they were the natural seed of Abraham, highly favoured, and distinguished from the world, for ages past, as his peculiar people, his sons and daughters, they should not long enjoy the illustrious title, but, like Ishmael, the son of the bond woman, be ejected and cast out of his house and family; that by faith, and faith only, in the Son of God, the promised
seed,

seed, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed, and not by their external privileges, they could be made free, could inherit the blessing, or become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The whole argument is summed up in the text: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

In discoursing upon this subject, it is proposed to show,

1. The freedom here intended.
2. The reality and excellence of this freedom, That this is to be free indeed.
3. That the Son of God alone makes us thus free.
4. Lastly, I shall apply the whole, in several inferences.

I. As to the freedom with which Christ makes us free, it is not such a freedom as answered the expectation and peculiar circumstances of the Jews, but such as was required by the necessitous state of mankind. It is true, the Jews were delivered from the burdensome ceremonies of the law, its rites and sacrifices, upon Christ's coming into the world, and erecting the gospel-kingdom; from whose obedience and death those sacrifices derived all their virtue, and in whom they had their full accomplishment, Heb. x. 1.—14. But however great this deliverance from the darkness and bondage of the law is, it is not principally
here

here meant ; but a deliverance of infinitely greater importance, from the bondage of corruption, by the gospel, extending to believers of all nations. The middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles being broken down, Christ became a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of his people Israel, proclaiming salvation to all the ends of the earth. And yet what vast numbers, lost to all sense of their own interest, rejecting Christ, whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light, continue the willing slaves of sin and Satan ! Nor is it less surprising to find many who pretend to the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, entangling themselves amidst the endless absurdities of superstition and will-worship, after the doctrines and commandments of men. Hence the invocation of saints and angels, the adoration of stocks and stones, the auricular confessions and masses, the penances and pilgrimages, the crusades, the fastings and scourgings ; not to mention the other numberless impositions of the church of Rome ; commands in themselves grievous, and in their consequences fatal.

But to return : We may consider this freedom from sin of which the text speak, with reference to the twofold bondage into which it has brought us : 1. As, by rendering us guilty before God, it has brought us under obligation to punishment. 2. As, by captivating our souls, it has gained power

power to command our obedience to its vitious inclinations.

1. As to the first kind of bondage by sin, namely, our obligation to punishment, let it be observed, that this is the deplorable natural state "of all the world, to stand guilty before God," liable, as insolvent debtors, to his justice. God being holy, must abhor sin, as it contradicts his nature, and perverts his best work. As a holy, wise, and righteous lawgiver, whose honour binds him to maintain the authority of his law and government, he must, with exemplary severity, punish sin. So he declares in the solemn sanction of his positive threatening against it. We therefore, by sin, are become the unhappy objects of God's displeasure, obnoxious to the malediction of his law: "We are children of wrath, and heirs of hell." How dreadful this bondage, to be cast out of God's favour, as an abhorrence to his holiness, and to be doomed to death by the righteous sentence of his law! Were one, by the justice of his country, condemned to die, and reserved in durance to a day fixed for his execution, would he not bewail his miserable lot, his most afflicting captivity? Still more completely wretched is our state, till we come to the knowledge of the Son of God, in being sentenced to die by the righteous judgement of that God who can cast both soul and body into hell: "He that believeth not, is condemned already." Of this condemnation, and of the certain approaching execution

tion of it, every sinner, in his intervals of sober thoughts, feels the most awful presages: "A dreadful sound is in his ears," that in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him. Affrighted with an evil conscience, "he fleeth when no man pursueth." From the enslaving terrors of this condemnation, the Son of God makes us free. His mediation averts the wrath of God, and obtains for us his favour and friendship, with "the adoption of sons."

Of this happy change in the sinner's state, some intimation is dropped into the conscience, which relieves it of the servile fear of death; — "gives the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" — inspiring the soul with the church's glad anthem, "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou hast comforted me. Behold! God is my salvation." — "Who now shall condemn? it is Christ that died." This answer of a good conscience towards God, gives filial confidence in approaching to him. "Having such a great High Priest over the house of God, we come boldly unto a throne of grace," animated with the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. — Which leads to observe,

2. That with reference to the *second* kind of bondage I mentioned, viz. the enslaving power of sin over our souls, the Son doth likewise make us free. Man, in his present corrupted state, possesses

not the free exercise of his rational powers, the fall has so weakened and perverted them.

1. His understanding is darkened, so that he cannot rightly conceive of God's nature and ways. The natural man has no comfortable views of God, with any certainty; but such confused misrepresentations of fancy, as subject him to those fears which haunt the dark shades of night. Nor, in this dismal state, can man apply to his proper work, or proceed regularly in it; but must sit down in uncertainty, and discouragement of heart. His state resembles that of the Egyptians, who, when gross darkness covered the land, sat down in their seats, disconsolate and hand-bound, "and rose not any of them from his place," to do any work. Or if man, thus blind, should attempt to work, instead of performing it to purpose, he must mar and spoil it.

2. We not only want light to direct, but also will and inclination, to our proper work. As the understanding is blinded, so the will is perverted, and has contracted a rooted aversion to the work of Heaven: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to his law," &c. This insurrection of man's will against the will of God is his bondage. True freedom is to act according to the original established order of nature. This order subjects man's will to his Creator's, the proper temper of man's soul in its sound constitution.

When,

When, in order to be free, men break off from this rule, they fall under the power of selfish passions, and become slaves to their own will, the froward impotent will of the flesh: as when a rebel sounds the trumpet of sedition against his lawful sovereign, many, seduced by his fair promises of liberty, resort to his standard; but they soon find, that, instead of gaining and insuring, they have lost their liberty, and are fallen under the most intolerable oppression of a lawless tyrant. Only in being subject to the will of God we are free; as our Lord says to the Jews, "If ye were Abraham's seed," i. e. the sons of liberty, as ye vaunt yourselves to be, "ye would do the works of Abraham; but ye are of your father the devil, and his works ye do." Your own lusts are his weapons by which he enslaves and destroys you. What an outcry for liberty is often heard from the basest slaves of corruption! — This leads to add,

3. That the affections are enslaved to the gross objects of sense, which entice and draw them away from God. They are broken loose from the rank they held in man's first constitution, and have degenerated into irregular appetites and wayward passions, arbitrary and impetuous, in their excentric motion, brooking no restraint from reason or conscience, but usurping the government to which they ought to be subject. The soul,

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which was formed for resting in God with supreme delight, is become an alien to him, and, in his place, has fixed upon earthly objects, suited to the inferior appetites of sense. Moderately to indulge these, in subordination to the ultimate end of man, is natural and allowable, and ever attended with some real enjoyment; but to give them the preference, to misplace the supreme affection of the heart upon the objects of sense, is wretched debasing slavery: for these sensual excesses never satisfy; they give pain and torment, in raising and enlarging desires which they cannot possibly satisfy. In pursuing them, man wearies himself “for that which is not bread.” They ever leave the soul empty and hungry, vexed and fretted with disappointment: A state of mind much resembling that of the prodigal, who would have filled his belly with husks, and was left to famish even without these; or that of a starved disappointed slave, condemned to hard labour, pining away in perpetual discontent and chagrin.

4. From this darkness of the understanding, this perverseness of the will, and sensuality of the affections, arises that excursive vanity of the mind which cannot fix in the consideration of any worthy object; which cannot, with stayed thought, “ponder the paths of life;” but starts desultory from object to object; and, after a transient glance at divine things, breaks off from them, in distaste or despair, to hunt after earthly vanities. What
pitiable

pitiable bondage is this disability to discern, and to dwell on the contemplation of the noble objects of heaven, so fit to entertain, to improve, and perfect the soul of man ; — to be void of taste for these, and by inclination to be hurried on in perpetual chase of one vanity after another, all frivolous and delusive, which ever mock our expectation, and which, being ever present before our eyes, and indulged by our affections, defile, corrupt, and debase the soul more and more ? — To complete the account of the natural captivity of man's soul, I add,

5. That, as an apostate from God, he is fallen under the power of Satan, who detains him in bondage. The sanction of the curse incurred by transgression, and the weak disordered state of man's soul, now bereft of the image of God, render him an easy prey to this wicked spirit. Hence his power to blind the minds of men, to hide the truth from them, to mislead the judgement to adopt the most pernicious errors. This power he exerciseth over many of the learned, who often mistake plain truths lying obvious to their view in scripture. Wise in their own conceit, and fancying their reason mighty to investigate all truth, in searching for it they drop dependence upon God, and trust in themselves. Left, therefore, of God, to remain under the blinding influence of Satan, and their own pride, they wander from truth :

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“ While they profess themselves to be wise, they become fools.” — “ Evil men understand not judgement.” — Satan also has power to operate upon the lusts and passions of man's heart; to solicit and draw them forth into action, thereby to defile, to corrupt, and harden, the heart still more. As “ god of this world, he rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience,” to keep them engaged to his vile drudgery by their own hearts lusts.

This our captivity to sin and Satan is attended with consequences which exceedingly imbitter the spirit of man, while the heart is starved, and the conscience fretted.

These are, perpetual disappointment, dissatisfaction, disgust, disquiet and vexation, self-condemnation, remorse and anguish, jealousies, fears, and divers troubles of life, under which one hears no comfort from a well-grounded hope, but the cutting upbraidings of conscience, ever sounding in his ear, that these are the fruits of his wickedness, forboding infinitely worse to follow. Thus are their sorrows multiplied who hasten after other gods. Every man's heart feels, that to be carnally minded is death, — present death to all his comforts. Every wicked soul is distracted and pulled asunder with divers conflicting passions, drawing contrary ways; each thwarting the other, as all of them together cross the will of God, and provoke his displeasure. Impotent man therefore,

fore, under their power, must be an abject slave, and undergo torture similar to that of the inhabitants of Rabbah, when put under saws and harrows of iron : no art of man to intrench and fortify himself in the delusion of false principles, can divert these painful feelings from indulged corruption : “ There is, there can be no peace to the wicked, who are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.”

From this complicated bondage and misery the Son of God sets us free. As he frees us from the condemning sentence of the law, so from the dominion of sin, that it shall not reign in us. He enlightens and corrects the judgement:—he turns us from darkness to light, and gives us to see the glory of the Lord :—he takes off the forwardness of the will, and subdues it to obedience:—he recovers the affections from their rambling after sensual delights, and purifies them into a prevailing taste for the “ things of the spirit ;” — turns the eyes from beholding vanities, and fixes them with supreme delight upon divine objects. Thus rectifying what sin has misplaced, allaying the sedition of the lower appetites and passions, and reducing them to their due subordination to the higher powers, he restores the soul to its primitive sound constitution, and rest in God. — Thus far concerning the
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nature of that liberty wherewith Christ makes us free.

II. I proceed, in the *second* place, to shew its reality and excellence, That this is to be free indeed. Which will appear by illustrating more particularly, what has been already observed in general, that from this freedom results the highest self-enjoyment, that peace and serenity of mind which constitute true happiness.

1. Whom Christ makes free, they are free indeed ; — free from those perplexing alarming fears which distract the mind of the wicked, and from that dreadful load of debt due to law and justice. This merciful Redeemer having, by the sacrifice of himself, in their room and stead, blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against them, nailing it to his cross, and thereby cancelled their obligation to punishment, proclaims pardon to their guilty, and liberty to their captive souls, “ opening the prison doors to them who were bound.” What holy joy must they now feel, “ when delivered out of the hands of their enemies, they serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of their life !” What transporting pleasure, when, beholding a reconciled God putting off all his ire, and an atoning Saviour, “ in whom they have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins,” they can say, in the triumphant language of
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of the inspired Paul, “Who shall lay any thing to our charge? It is God that justifies: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” Thrice happy they who thus enjoy that divine rest which strangers cannot intermeddle with, “walking in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.”

2. It contributes farther to this self-enjoyment and happiness, flowing from our freedom by Christ, that as he obtains our pardon, the divine forgiveness, he also raises us in himself to the high privilege of adoption. Tho’ once outcasts from God, the children and slaves of sin and Satan, we are now the sons of God; — once far off, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers and foreigners from the covenant of promise; but now brought nigh, fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; — poor in the world it may be, yet rich in faith, and heirs of a kingdom; — bondmen perhaps in an enemy’s country, and yet free of the city of the living God, “who have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we can cry, Abba, Father;” and are enabled, with filial boldness and confidence, to spread all our sins and all our sorrows before him, who is our compassionate father, and never-failing friend.

3. Believers being, by faith in Christ, raised to the most honourable relation of sons, are for ever safe under the protection of their Lord and King,

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who rules in righteousness, and sways a sceptre of grace over all his children. "A father of the fatherless, a judge of the widow, is God in his holy habitation:" Their dwelling is on high; their place of defence is the munition of rocks; the eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them are his everlasting arms. Thus safe, under the shadow of him that is Almighty, they are not afraid of evil tidings; they lie down in peace, and sleep, knowing that the Lord will make them to dwell in safety.

4. One cannot well conceive self-enjoyment more pleasing and delightful, than a heart to apply with vigour and alacrity to the work of God, to be no more enslaved by the lusts of the flesh, having these in subjection to the nobler powers of the soul, which, as you have already heard, is an essential part of the liberty wherewith Jesus makes us free.

To approve of one thing, and to be dragged by inclination to the contrary, is a perfect resemblance of the condition of a slave. In this mutinous state of mind, man is a tyrant to himself; the usurpation of his froward inclination ever exposing him to the severe scourges of his aggrieved conscience. But when the will readily falls in with what the judgement recommends as the will of God, man then walks at liberty, uninthrall'd by his discordant faculties and passions; grace so restoring these to their lost harmony, that the one in its natural order follows the other. All now is
peace

peace within, in quiet subjection to lawful authority. Conscience, the word, and the Spirit, with their joint testimony, give peace. Yea, peace naturally rises from the regular acting of a renewed soul:—"The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." But when one attends to the excellency of this orderly course of the soul with respect to the great object on which it terminates, and the consummate felicity to which it leads, his peace rises to "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

There is one other ingredient in this freedom, which gives the highest self-enjoyment; that is, easy access to the purest entertainment, suited to the rational part of man. This entertainment is found in the very work of religion, as I just now observed;—in the exercise of the several graces, suited to the different circumstances of life,—in the communications of divine aid,—and in fellowship with God.

1. The saint is entertained, nay delighted, with his work. He can take up his Lord's words, and say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God," it is my meat and my drink,—yea, "it is more to me than my necessary food." His work being the spontaneous acting of his powers restored to health, or of a heart attempered to the law, it is therefore his freedom. "Thy

commandments (saith the Psalmist) are not grievous; — they are the rejoicing of my heart; in keeping them there is a great, an exceeding great reward.”

If to this we add the assurance of divine aid, which worketh in us both to will and to do, to what an exalted pitch must the joy of the Christian arise, who feels and knows, “that being a fellow-worker with God, his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord?” Even afflictions afford consolations that are not small, the communications of divine grace, the rejoicing of hope, and of a good conscience, while they give occasion to the exercise of faith, of patience, of humility, of meekness, of submission, and resignation. Hence we find the Apostles glorying in tribulation, counting it all joy when they fell into divers temptations; and thus are the saints strengthened and comforted by their trials and conflicts.

And what shall I say of their delightful fellowship with God in Christ, when, through him, they all have “access by one Spirit unto the Father?” — Now, they know from their happy experience, that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and that he will shew them his covenant. — And, O, how blessed! when, in answer to their earnest prayer, “We beseech thee show us thy glory,” he “makes all his goodness to pass before them,” and warms
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their heart with reciprocal returns of love and gratitude.

This holy communion with their God and Father they enjoy through the means of grace, the private and public ordinances of divine appointment: in meditation, in prayer and praise, in reading and hearing the word, and particularly in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. On this mountain, and at this table, the Lord of hosts makes indeed for his people "a feast of fat things, full of marrow." Here the believing communicant, satisfied with the goodness of God's house, sits under his shadow with great delight, eating of his pleasant fruits. With what overflowing joy does he hear the endearing voice of his Redeemer, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!"—In this manner the just, the upright man, when stripped of all worldly delights, is satisfied from his happy capacity of receiving communications of grace from God, and of holding intercourse with him; whereas the wicked, in the fulness of his sufficiency, is ever in want; ever disappointed of expected satisfaction from the world, haunted with the spectres of a guilty conscience, and frightened imagination.

But it is proper to observe, that this liberty and joy of good men, arising from a sense of the divine favour, and restoration to the image of God, are not obtained here to perfection.

True it is, that every believer, with respect to
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his state, is at once perfectly changed. He “passes from death to life,” is absolved from condemnation, and received into favour.— Adopted into God’s family, he enters upon an unalienable title to the inheritance of the saints, never to be forfeited, notwithstanding his many unbelieving fears. It is also true, that the good work, his recovery from sin to holiness, is begun, and shall be carried on, with increasing light, and love, and liberty, unto the day of Christ. But nevertheless, far from having already attained, or being already perfect, he still feels “a law in his members warring against the law of his mind;” hence many painful struggles with the remains of the old man, the body of death, that still cleaves to him. As the captive children, when delivered out of Babylon, and after Cyrus had announced their liberty to go up and build the Lord’s house at Jerusalem, went up weeping in great affliction, and amidst the reproach of surrounding enemies, ever lying in wait to interrupt them in their work, to injure and oppress them; in like manner, after the Redeemer has proclaimed liberty to his captives, they go up to the heavenly Jerusalem, entangled, retarded, and molested in their course by many enemies, groaning within themselves to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God; but, notwithstanding all these discouragements, they still go on, from strength to strength, through much tribulation,

tribulation, till every one of them appears before God in Zion.

At the happy hour of their death, a passage opens to the land of everlasting light and joy, “where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.” They enter into peace; they rest in their beds, sleeping in Jesus, and hear no more the voice of the oppressor. “There the prisoners rest together, and the servant is free from his master.” Their heaven-born spirits, dismissed from mortality, ascend with rapturous joy to join the ransomed above in songs of salvation to God and to the Lamb. And being now freed from the defilement and fetters of flesh and blood, “they are without fault before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.”

At the last day, the great day of the manifestations of the sons of God, their dead bodies shall arise incorruptible, glorious, strong, spiritual, fitted for the service and enjoyments of the blissful regions of immortality, the mansions prepared for them in their Father’s house. Refined, and “fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body,” they shall resemble the winged seraphims, prompt as they to execute God’s commands, and fulfil all his pleasure. Swift as the wind, bright as the stars, they shall ascend, with loud Hosanna’s, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall they ever be with the Lord. Thus admitted into the palace of the Eternal

ternal King, “there shall be no more curse, no more death, nor pain, nor sorrow, nor crying; but the throne of God, and of the Lamb, shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him;—and they shall see his face;—and his name shall be in their foreheads;—and there shall be no night there;—and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and, as kings and priests unto their God, they shall reign for ever and ever.”——To this amazing height shall the freedom arise with which Christ has promised to crown his people; happiness unknown to the subjects of earthly princes, however great and bountiful. “Be joyful then, ye children of Zion, in your King.” Exult to see him coming in his glory, to make you thus glorious.——This leads me to shew,

P A R T II.

III. THAT the Son of God only can make us thus free.——For illustration of which point, I remark, 1. That the very appellation of SON implies the idea of his divinity. 2. That he must be God who is able to procure our freedom. Which will appear, 3. from a view of what he must necessarily do for effecting it.

Before I enter upon the discussion of these particulars, allow me to notice, that the One God is, distinguished

distinguished into Three. Which Three, as they are not, nor can be, three distinct beings, neither can the language of scripture be construed into merely three diverse modes of existence in the one Divine Essence. The appellations of *Father*, *the Word*, or *Son*, and *the Holy Spirit*, must import more. And though the terms in use, *Persons of the Trinity*, do not convey a clear idea of *Three* which are not three distinct beings but *One* in essence, they are perhaps the best our language can admit of; and will be allowed, by modest minds, that delight not in perverse disputings, to pass as harmless, if not perfectly fit modes of expressing what is manifestly revealed, but what we cannot comprehend; as indeed we cannot enter into the mysterious incomprehensible nature of God, *the Immense Eternal Father of Spirits*, so far as to be able to say with understanding, that this doctrine, which puzzles reason, is contrary to reason, and consequently not true.—— And now,

1. As to the appellation of *the Son*, by way of pre-eminence, i. e. the uncreated, only-begotten Son of God, it evidently imports his Deity, and perfect equality to the Father. This acceptance of the name seemed to be familiar to the Jews, John v. 18. That it was applied to him, with respect to both natures in his one person, is plain from John i. 14.: “And the Word was made flesh,” &c. It is acknowledged, that the Word is the

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name by which the Second Person of the Trinity is designed. The glory of the divine Word is said to be the glory of the only-begotten Son. The appellation of *Son*, therefore, belongs to him as God. That it applies to the entire person, God-man, is put out of doubt by Heb. i. 8.: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," &c. : words which celebrate the Son as God. — It is also true, that sometimes, with respect to his human nature, and mediatory office, he is designed the *Son*; as when the Son is said not to know the last day; and that then he shall be subject to God. But it is equally true, that, with respect to his divine nature, the above scriptures design him the *Son*; and that, chiefly, in regard to his divinity, this title is given to Christ.

Since, then, the scripture designs Christ the *Son*, while it points him out as God, it is ever safe for us to follow its language. In doing so, we are in no danger of being led into misapprehensions of priority and inferiority in the Persons of the Trinity. Nor has it been found, that this appellation, *God the Son*, of constant use in the church for several ages, has disturbed the faith of Christians, or hindered their rejoicing in God, in experience of his gracious acceptance of their addresses directed in name of God the Son.

But some will affect to be exquisitely nice, and wiser than the Spirit of God, in the choice of pertinent

inent modes of expressing truth; and, by their corrections, their arbitrary distinctions, and their fond explications of terms different from common use, what service have they done to the interests of truth and religion? What other purpose is served by their vain singularity, than that of raising needless doubts and scruples, increasing divisions, and breaking the unity and peace of the church? — But I proceed to shew,

2. That, to accomplish our freedom, it was necessary that the Son, while he partakes of the nature of man, should also be God, equal in dignity and glory to the Father. It was fit and necessary, that he who was to redeem and restore the ruined human race, should be the same by whom man was first created. Accordingly we find, that the scripture-account of man's redemption by Jesus is often accompanied with a description of his divine power in creating and governing all things; chap. 1. of this gospel, Col. i. and Heb. i. Which affords this instruction, That to be qualified for the work of our redemption, the undertaker must stand to us in the relation of creator.

Were he a creature only, and not God, considering the infinite disproportion between God and the most exalted creature, it is not conceivable what interest his intercession could have with God to procure favour for any of his offending creatures. If the offence was to be pardoned by a pure act of

grace, without any ransom, what influence could a creature have to move the exercise of this grace? The creature's attempt to plead for it, would be blasphemy, as it would be an audacious pretension to greater grace and goodness than was in God. If the offending creature was to be restored upon a competent ransom, how could a creature give this ransom? What had he to offer over and above the duty he owed for himself?

That the Redeemer, therefore, may be qualified for accomplishing the entire work of redemption, (the necessary atonement for sin, and our actual deliverance from the bondage of death), he must possess the dignity and power of God; he must be *above* all creatures, the Almighty Creator himself.

He must also be the SON, the second in order, a distinct person from the Father, but necessarily his equal, as subsisting in the same divine essence; equally with him hating sin, and zealous to support the rights of justice. Accordingly it is said of the Son, Heb. i. 8. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the scepter of thy kingdom is a scepter of righteousness. — Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." It was competent for him, the Son, to interpose between sinners and the Father, the supreme judge and protector of the law, to avert from them the vengeance of his justice, and to remove the obstruction, to the
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mighty agency of the Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, for their healing.

In him, the only-begotten and eternal Son of God, in him alone we could have been made free, and become the adopted sons of God. Had he not been found qualified for these purposes, we must have remained in slavery, and have perished for ever. — This will further appear, if we consider,

3. What, in law, was incumbent upon him for effecting our freedom.

1. He must perfectly obey the law as a servant, in the nature that offended : for thus it behoved the law to be magnified, before it could admit our freedom. In order to this, he must be made of a woman, and be partaker of our nature. But that his obedience to the divine law might avail us, he must be more than man. At the same time that he is a servant, he must likewise be Lord of all ; under no natural obligation to the law as the law of a superior, but subject to it only as a law taking rise from the perfection of his own nature. Were he not thus absolutely free and independent, his obedience could not, in law, be sustained as a service for others, but for himself only. Therefore, that he might be in a capacity of availing others by his service, he must be God ; having right and power to form a perfectly holy man, and to join this man to his divine person. And thus, “ he being in the form of God, took upon

upon him the form of a servant." The great God, the Son of the living God, became man. Both natures (without any transmutation of the one nature into the other) still retaining their distinct properties, by a mysterious union constituted one glorious person; the one nature, i. e. the human, rendering him capable of obeying as a servant; the other, i. e. the divine, stamping infinite value upon the service of his humanity; highly meritorious of all favour to those guilty creatures whom he represented. — Again,

2. It was incumbent upon him to give a sufficient ransom, for procuring our freedom. — Nothing is more evident from scripture, nor more consonant to the strain of the law, nor to the majesty of the divine lawgiver, than, that for obtaining our freedom, such a ransom was necessary; both for saving the veracity of God, and for supporting the authority of his law and government. Now, the only ransom that could be sufficient was the sacrifice of himself. Law and justice required, that the satisfaction, by suffering, should be in that nature whose offence made it necessary. The "Surety, therefore, must be of the seed of Abraham, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest; and might, by suffering death, make his soul an offering for sin." But in order to his being supported under, and honourably carried through his great sufferings; that they might be of sufficient worth and value to answer the ends of
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of the divine government, and equivalent to the punishment incurred by guilty man, he must also be God. Were he only a man, he could not by any means redeem his brethren, nor give to God a sufficient ransom for them.

Consider further,

That the Surety who gives this ransom, must be one, who, after suffering for a time, ought to rise to life, and receive his reward; for it contradicts justice and goodness, to admit an innocent person to subject himself to endless extreme sufferings for the guilty. The Surety, therefore, after tasting death for men, fully to the satisfaction of justice, must revive from it, “and enter into his glory,” and bring with him those for whom he suffered. For should he not rise, but remain under sufferings, his people must for ever remain in their sins,—in the bonds of guilt and death. The case standing thus, who but the Son of God could make us free, by giving himself a ransom for us? who, but he, could by one great offering, the temporary sacrifice of himself, perfect for ever the expiation of sin,—procure our escape from the curse, and liberty to enter with him into the holy place? But again,

3. As by giving himself a ransom he was to purchase our freedom, so was it incumbent upon him to restore us to the original rectitude of our nature, in man’s first creation: which nothing less than omnipotence was able to accomplish. He displayed

played the dignity and power of God, in giving such a ransom as the law required ; and by giving it he acquired right in law to employ his divine power for our healing ; the great end for which he suffered and died ; as we read, Eph. v. 25. " Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, — that he might present it to himself a glorious church." — He first gave himself a ransom, and having thereby removed the obstruction from the curse to the exercise of grace, he now applies his power to restore and heal us. He performs both in his own person, and the one in order to the other. It was fit and necessary, that the new creation should be reared, as was the first, by a divine agency of the three persons, analogous to that which at first produced and formed the world ; — that, as the Father created all things by the Son, he should also restore man by the Son, equally active with the Father, in the same divine essence, by the almighty agency of the Holy Spirit ; to whose influences, for raising the new creation, the Son, " for the suffering of death," has right in law. By this Spirit he delivers with power.

In general, he delivers us out of the hands of our enemies, enemies powerful, subtle, and resolute to hold us in their chain. The words of the prophet apply here, Jer. l. 33. " The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together, and all that took them captives held them fast, they refused to let them go. — Their Redeemer

deemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name ; he will thoroughly plead their cause. — He shall divide the spoil with the strong. — He shall take the prey from the mighty, and deliver his *lawful* captives,” — his property in law, he having paid their ransom.

The grand enemy that holds guilty man in captivity is Satan. He is “the strong man, who keeps the house, and all his goods,” i. e. all the powers of man’s soul in a fatal security, “till a stronger than he come upon him, and bind him, and spoil him of his armour, and cast him out.” And who is this stronger one? who but “the lion of the tribe of Judah?” — “the Son of God, who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil.” These are, our inbred lusts, from love to which we are pleased with our captivity, and ever unwilling to change our state, till the Redeemer, “by the rod of his strength sent out of Zion,” make us willing. — I add,

That for restoring us to freedom, he must, as scripture expresses it, create us of new in himself, in order to our partaking of his life. The destruction of our primitive holy nature by sin, renders this necessary. The original beauty of God’s image upon the soul of man is lost ; the comely order of its faculties is broken ; the life which sustained their harmony, which animated and directed them in their course to God, being

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extinct ;

extinct: hence we are even "dead in trespasses and sins." To recover our freedom from this disordered carnal mind, "which is enmity against God," and to direct our hearts unto the love of God, it is necessary that the divine life be restored: A work to which the Son of God alone is equal; "for in him was life, and the life was the light of men." For inspiring this life into the dead souls of men, "the Spirit was given him without measure: "He having made peace by the blood of his cross, it pleased the Father that in him all fullness should dwell, all the treasures of wisdom and of understanding." "As the Father raiseth up the dead, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will," by the Spirit, with which he is anointed. This power, essential to him as God, the Father confers upon him as Mediator, on account of his satisfaction to justice by the suffering of death. It is in this character the Lord thus speaks of himself, Is. lxi. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them who are bound."

How the Lord, by the Spirit, actually translates us to a state of freedom, we partly learn from ch. xvi. of this gospel, from verse 7. to 15. where the stated order in which our deliverance proceeds is described. First, "the Spirit con-

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vinces the sinner of sin," of condemnation and bondage ; that, in these deplorable circumstances, he is absolutely helpless in himself ; and that, by any works of righteousness in his power, he cannot get from under the curse of the law, and the power of sin.—The sinner, thus made sensible of bondage, and extreme misery, the Spirit relieves by bringing to his view the redemption that is in Jesus, the all-sufficient help provided for perishing sinners in the Son of God, proclaiming in his heart, as by an audible voice, those words of grace,—" O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself ; but in me is thy help."—Look unto me, and be thou saved. See the righteousness of God manifested in me ; surely in me you have " righteousness and strength ;" upon which the sinner's contrite, disponding heart revives. He sees help in Jesus ; in seeing it he looks for it ; he applies, he calls for it ; he fastens upon it as all his salvation and all his hope. Thus, in giving faith, and by faith uniting us to himself, the Lord delivers our souls. And now the heart, conceiving hope in God, with tears of joy begins to work in love towards him. The affections, loosed from idols, flow forth, in a strong current, towards the Redeemer.

Having thus raised the sinner to life by faith, he puts his Holy Spirit within him, to preserve faith, that it may not fail, but increase in strength ; to bear down sin, that it may never regain its

former dominion, but gradually consume away of its deadly wound.

The enemies of the soul, having lost their prey, will, by all methods of deceit and violence, contend for the recovery of it. By repeated attempts they will strive to draw the believer back to his former bondage. But all in vain : — he shall, by the superior power of his mighty leader, maintain his liberty ; and, maugre all opposition, “hold on his way, waxing stronger and stronger.” He meets with many straits and difficulties, with many fears and discouragements, which bring him into bondage of spirit : but the Lord is ever nigh with the supports of his grace, seasonably to relieve and restore him. By some suitable word of promise he revives and helps him over his discouragements. Thus the truth, and faith in the truth, which first made him free, ever secures his freedom, and keeps him in heart. The Lord is engaged to secure the believer’s safety on the way : and he is faithful and powerful to execute his trust. — “He will feed his flock like a shepherd.” — None of them can be lost. “All shall be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. — His sheep hear his voice. — They follow him. — He gives unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish ; neither shall any pluck them out of his hands. — He shall guide them by his counsel through life, and afterwards receive them into glory. — The last enemy he shall destroy is death.”

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For completing their freedom, “he shall in the end ransom them from the power of the grave, he shall redeem them from death,” and call forth his prisoners into the light of glory, in fulfilment of that promise. “He that seeth, and believeth in the Son, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.—For the Lord himself shall descend, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God.—Then all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, saying, Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust.—And his dead men shall live; together with his dead body shall they rise,” and live, shining resplendent with his glory, which shall then be seen upon them in perfection.

The last great affize being over, he will bring them with him, as his brethren and co-heirs, into his Father’s house and kingdom, there to abide and reign with him for ever, delighted with the abundance of its peace, liberty, and glory. No more shall they go out, to be exposed to the troubles, temptations, and painful discipline which attended their minority here. “Those former things are for ever done away.—And the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and lead them into living fountains of water.”—A new peaceful scene of pure, sublime delights, in a perennial unintermitting flow.

In this exalted state of consummate, unchangeable happiness, their hearts shall rejoice, and only

ly rejoice, ever singing in raptures high, — “Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God.”

To raise sinners from the lowest abasement, “from darkness and the shadow of death,” to this wonderful height of light and freedom, is a mighty undertaking indeed! Who but the Son of God was fit to engage in it, or able to execute it? who but he had merit to purchase, or power to confer “the high prize?” Certified, by the testimony of God, that, with such superlative honour, Jesus shall, from himself, crown all his living members, we may well lift up the voice, and say, — “Surely this is the Son of God.”

IV. APPLICATION.

I. The subject brings joyful tidings to our ears. It points out a sure way in which we may recover our freedom from the most wretched state of slavery. Hear our message from God to sinful men; hear it, and let your hearts go forth to meet it with joy. — Ye may rise from condemnation to favour; from the froward temper of rebels, to the loving obedient disposition of children; which is attended with the joy of self-approbation, and with the gladdening expressions of God's fatherly love. All of us may be thus made free, the poor as well as the rich, the servant as well as the master. Hear, and submit to the Son of God, and rise to liberty; rise to the inheritance

heritance of glory. Although once the slaves of hell, now commence heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ, of his everlasting kingdom, where all present distinctions shall cease, and all the saints “shall be kings and priests unto God.”

“The chief of sinners,” as well as the soberer sort, may be thus made free: “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. — He came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” — All are invited to the liberty of the sons of God. Shall we not all then be ambitious of it, and every one desire it for himself? saying, with anxious concern of soul, “May I, a poor, guilty, despised, neglected creature! may I hope to be thus made free?” — Did we feel our deplorable bondage, did we believe the serious proclamation of freedom from heaven, with what eagerness would every one listen to it?

Were any of you incumbered with debt, standing in fear of a pursuit by the creditor, how glad would you be, to hear of a cautioner generously offering to pay your debt? Were you shut up in prison, condemned by justice to die a public shameful death, what would be the state of your mind in hearing of a pardon come from your prince? yea more, in hearing his declared purpose to raise you to favour, to advance you to eminent honours, to adopt you as a son; and all upon your accepting of these high privileges as the pure favours of his grace? Such, and infinitely more important,

important, is the message we bring you from God, even the offer of redemption from the curse,—of pardon and eternal life,—of being clothed with the garments of salvation,—of being adopted into his family,—and exalted to a kingdom;—and all this upon your willing acceptance of his gracious favours. The only hindrance to our deliverance is our unwillingness. God proclaims liberty to every soul that *will* be made free. His just complaint of the unbelieving hearers of the gospel is, “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” How perverse is this refusal? How must it aggravate our guilt? What can we plead in excuse for it? Hear the Lord’s upbraiding words to the Jews, directed to us:—“If I had not come, and offered freedom to you, you had not had sin; but now you have no cloke for your sin: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”

2. We see, that only upon the mediatory plan, through the knowledge and faith of the Son of God, our deliverance comes. This plan claims these necessary advantages for our freedom, peculiar to itself. 1. It brings with it absolute certainty of its divine authority. 2. It recommends itself to the conscience as worthy of God. It exhibits the divine attributes harmoniously combined, and shining forth in the height of their glory, each reflecting a lustre upon the other. 3. It comes attended with a spirit and power that raise

raise the dead, that rectify the heart, and enliven it with divine love.

The wisdom of the world will have this plan to be irrational; but, considering the present lapsed state of human nature, it is indeed the only rational scheme for our recovery: "They are unreasonable and wicked men, who hear, and believe it not." It is ridiculous vanity to pretend to arrive at true virtue and happiness upon any other plan. Those who attempt to persuade the world of man's natural power to work himself into freedom, do thereby but expose their vanity and pride to the pity and contempt of sober-thinking persons, who in good earnest are inquiring after satisfaction and rest to their souls in God. Do we not know what man by his natural powers can do? Do we not know that these pretended friends to virtue "do glory in appearance, and not in heart?" that they boast of a false gift? that in their blind opposition to the revealed plan of salvation through Christ, they possess not, in any degree, genuine divine virtue? Have not many, of distinguished capacity, as eager as any infidel "to find life by the works of their own hands,"—have they not tried, with the intense vigour of their souls, "what the law could do for them?" and found it "weak through the flesh?"—That favour and peace, righteousness and holiness, (as they pursued these with confidence in their own strength for working righteousness), fled

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from them, and left them forsaken and despairing, till, by the word and Spirit of God, their eyes were turned to the gospel-way of peace. Surely, "in returning, and resting on God through Christ, we are saved." In humble quiet confidence, founded upon this Rock, is our strength.

3. We see our high obligation to the love of God; — to the love of the Father, who spared not his own Son, but sent him to our lost world, "in the likeness of sinful flesh," by the most painful servitude to purchase redemption for us. How high our obligation to the Son! who, to procure our freedom, cheerfully agreed to take on him the form of a servant; to subject himself to contempt and contradiction, to sorrows and agonies, to the most exquisitely cruciating pains, justly due to our sins? In this dispensation, justice appears terrible. The manifold wisdom of God, in devising the expedient, which, with full satisfaction to the law, displays grace in all the riches of its glory, engages the admiration of angels and saints. But it was love, divine love, and grace passing knowledge, that moved God to this exertion of wisdom; which sets his love in a still stronger light. Now it is manifest, that "God is love." This is the great good arising from the inexcusable evil of man's apostasy; — the bright manifestation of the entire glory of God, of his boundless goodness, his self-moving everlasting love,

love, his awful majesty and holiness, tempered with the kindness and grace of a Saviour ; — mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other ; — all shining in divine harmony to promote the grand design of saving souls from death. O what engagement to love is here ! what obligation to gratitude, to a ready, humble, thankful compliance with the godlike benevolent scheme ! To neglect this salvation, the result of unbounded wisdom and grace, — wilfully to refuse the benefit of it, — in scorn to turn aside from it, to what we are pleased to call a more rational scheme, — is of all sins the greatest. It is the basest ingratitude, the blackest, the most complicated crime, the sin ever looked upon. It is such an outrage of malice against God, as is not, perhaps, overmatched in hell. Alienated from God, as hell itself, is the dark heart of man, till the attractive glory of redeeming love open to its view ; — then, and only then, disarmed of its disaffection, it feels itself gently drawn to God, by the powerful constraints of love ; agreeably to that expression in Jer. xxxi 3. “ I have loved thee with an everlasting love ; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.”

4. If any should ask, How may I know whether Christ has made me free ? the question admits of an easy solution. If made free, attend, and you *may* know ; for you must feel it. A re-

view of what has been said will help to satisfy you.
—— But for your further assistance,

(1.) If you have been convinced of condemnation and death by the law; — if the more you strove to be relieved by your own works, you sunk the deeper into bondage; — if, when reduced to great distress, in self-despair, (as a forlorn outcast ready to perish), your eyes then were opened to see, with wonder, deliverance provided in a crucified Jesus, his helping hand graciously stretched out to you; — if, with assured understanding of this gospel-method of relief, (which you could not before be persuaded of, nor apply for your relief, though you oft heard of it, and pled it with God in prayer), you have fled to Christ as your alone refuge, finding in him that deliverance, peace, and rest, which you sought, but could not obtain, by the law: — surely you are “sent forth out of the pit;” you are made free. This turn of mind, from self-righteousness to the righteousness of God by faith, indicates a saving work of grace, that has moulded the heart into the form of the new covenant.

(2.) If your taste is altered so, that the prevailing delight of your heart is in God, you are free. The essence of sin lies “in loving pleasures more than God.” Moderately to delight in the creature, being constitutional to innocent nature, cannot be forbidden; but in heart to prefer any creature to God, is criminal. And let it be remarked,

ed, that such may be the carnal temper, not only of those who habitually indulge appetite to excess, but of those who are strictly temperate. For while they use the world sparingly, their whole soul's delight may be in its comforts, without any taste for the things of the Spirit. It concerns us, then, with careful attention, to examine, whether, while we use the world soberly, we find preferable entertainment to our spirits in God. It is certain, that men may regard the dictates of reason, so far as to keep their appetites and passions under restraint, and yet please themselves with bodily satisfactions in moderation, without any delight in God. And thus the sober and abstemious may be as void of the life of God as the riotous glutton and drunkard. But if your inclination to vitious indulgences be changed into a distaste of them; — if, while you allow nature its moderate gratification in the creature, still your reigning joy is in God, abstaining not only from those excesses which would destroy this spiritual taste, but even from such licence in pleasure as may impair or weaken it : — by this you may know that you are delivered from the sinful excessive love of the creature.

And now being delivered, feel your obligation to the love and grace of God. O love, and be thankful to your kind deliverer, the generous loving Son of God : “ You are bound to give thanks always to him who has called you to his kingdom and glory, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.” — “ Let your soul
magnify

magnify the Lord, your spirit rejoice in God your Saviour." He has done great things for you indeed : yet it is but an earnest of greater things to follow. — Exult in the prospect before you. Your begun deliverance is a door of hope, " like the valley of Achor," in the entry to Canaan, that you shall surely enter in, and possess it. He who, " by his right hand, brought you up out of the sea," will lead you on safe unto perfect liberty, rest, and glory. O love the Lord, all ye his saints ; be thankful, and ever praise that grace " which hath made you meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Shew your love to him, your deliverer, by continued expressions of your love to holiness. Now you are free, use not your liberty as a cloke to sin. This abuse of grace is peculiar to the ungodly. It is foreign to the nature of a Christian. If you make free with sin, pretend not to faith : say not you have learned this of Christ ; it is blasphemy. If truly taught the truth " as it is in Jesus," holiness will be your liberty : nor will you ever think yourself perfectly free, till you are perfectly holy. There is no point of truth in the Bible, no doctrine, no promise, no precept, no ordinance, but is directly levelled at sin, to root it out, and fitted to promote holiness ; and so all God's children understand the scriptures.

I conclude with a short address to my young hearers ; to which I beg their serious attention.

You are naturally fond of liberty ; but, deceived by imagination, you often mistake it, and, in its place, take up with what is your slavery, your present shame and disgrace, and which shall be your torment in after life, and on a deathbed.

Pleasure you pursue as your happiness ; — here it is in reality : — “ If thou knewest the gift of God,” Jesus, the Son of the living God, “ thou wouldst ask of him, and he would give thee living waters ;” solid, satisfying, permanent pleasures.

What think you of having the powers of your mind free to dwell upon the noblest objects, which presented to your view, will give you high entertainment ? What think you of having these great objects near you, in every situation, in the midst of trouble, to afford you solacing relief ?

You may now possess an easy mind, undisturbed with the cares and crosses of life ; but if you live long in the world, you shall meet with troubles, troubles under which you can have no firm support but from religion. O how soothing the consolation in adversity ! to look inward upon one’s self, and, in consulting conscience and the scriptures, to hear both speaking peace from God, and assuring you that all shall end well !

If now, in youth, you refuse to come under Christ’s yoke ; — if, bursting the bands, you give
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full swing to vicious inclinations; — there is little hope of your return to God in advanced life; It is far more likely that you will run riot to the end, — remain insensible to all religious impressions, — proceed from evil to worse, — and go down to the “grave with your bones full of the iniquities of youth.”

After having spent the strength and vigour of life in the service of sin, the evil days shall come, when you shall wish, and wish in vain, to be made free. Feeling the torment of your domineering passions, then confirmed into inveterate habits, you will desire to shake them off, and not be able. You will perhaps say, “The Spirit of God can conquer them.” True, he can; and great wonders the grace of God has done. But such miracles of grace are very rare, and not to be presumed upon. Your presumptuous sinning may proceed to such a daring height, as may provoke the Spirit to cease “striving with you;” that “though you seek him, you shall not find him; though you call upon him, he will not hear you;” but, in just anger, give you cause, in sore distress, to take up Saul’s dolorous complaint, “The Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams,” 1 Sam. xxviii.

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We are sure, that at what time a sinner repents, God will receive him; but the season of grace, for obtaining repentance, may be sinned away.

away. There may be a limited period fixed, in the purpose of God, for the return of a sinner; which, if exceeded, it will not suit with the wise measures of the divine government to grant repentance; or if, after you have consumed the prime of life in the wild wastes of sin, you should be recovered, it will probably be with bitter remorse, with terror and astonishment of heart: “You shall be ashamed and confounded, bearing the reproach of your youth.” — “The wickedness of your licentious course shall correct you.” God will take vengeance upon your inventions: “He will put away your sins;” but with severe rebukes and chastisements he may visit them upon you, and upon your children after you. The children yet unborn may suffer for your wanton extravagancies; as the sins of Manassah, though forgiven him, were severely visited upon Judah several years after. Therefore seek the Lord, while he is near, in the days of youth. Harken now to the ministry of liberty from God. Hear, and comply with it, and you are for ever delivered.

Ye who have the advantage of a Christian education, under religious parents, see you do not frowardly neglect this advantage; if you do, ye are in danger of being left of God to a greater height in wickedness than others, and to be involved in distinguished reproach and misery in this life.

X Harken,

Hearken, therefore, now to instruction, and live.
—— I add,

That there is particular encouragement to young persons, that if they seek the Lord, they shall find him. “They who seek me early,” saith the Spirit, “shall find me.” Persevering in abstinence from known sin, and “in searching for God” in the duties of religion, they are sure to find him at length.

Nor is this all : For those who devote the first fruits of their years to the service of God, are peculiarly dear to him, and bid fair for being honoured with particular expressions of his regard, denied to his other children. Thus God expressed his particular delight in young Samuel, by admitting him immediately into his secrets, preferably to old Eli. I might name others, who, for their early piety, are in scripture marked as peculiar favourites of Heaven.

Let all these reasons persuade you, my dear young hearers, to give Christ your hearts without delay, and without reserve. Beg of God himself to open your hearts to understand and embrace the truth. And when you have got your hearts engaged to Christ by faith and love, go, seal your covenant with him at his table : “Yield yourselves unto the Lord, and then enter into his sanctuary.”

We advise you not, without a change of disposition by grace, to partake of that solemn ordinance,

nance, in hope it will prove a restraint upon your passions, and preserve you from the vicious course of the world. No covenant, no engagement, can command the corrupt heart, or bridle its lusts. Nothing short of the new heart, made new by the grace of God's covenant, can bind us to God, and secure a truly Christian conversation. Get the heart enlightened with faith, and warmed with love to Christ. "Incline your ear, and come unto him;" then profess and seal your engagement to him at his table: "And he will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.—He will ever remember the kindness of thy youth.—Nor shall his kindness ever depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of his peace be removed from thee, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. In righteousness shalt thou be established; and be preserved unto his heavenly kingdom. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."—By these words of truth, may the grace of God proclaim liberty to us all.
Amen.

S E R M O N I V.

Christ the true light of the world.

J O H N, i. 9.

That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

FOR laying firm and strong the foundation of mens faith and hope of salvation by Jesus, the apostle introduces the history of the Saviour's incarnation, life, and death, with a magnificent description of his real Godhead; shewing, that he who came, in the humble form of man, to redeem the world, was the Eternal God, the same who in the beginning created heaven and earth. In such divine hands, surely, the arduous undertaking to restore guilty men to life and favour cannot fail.

In him, the Son, as one with the Father and Spirit, is life essentially. He is the source of life and being to every creature. In him, as Mediator, in consequence of his engagement for men, is lodged spiritual and eternal life. All the life that ever did, or ever shall, animate the soul of any of Adam's apostate race, is derived from him,

as the gift of God, through his mediation and merit.

Prophets, and holy men of God, were commissioned to announce the coming of the Messiah, and to point mens view to him as their life. The obscure notices given of him in ancient prophecies, in sacrifices, and the other shadowy representations under the law, were then the only true light that guided men to God. In these last days, upon the actual appearance of the Messiah, the old shadows have brightened into day. The Sun of Righteousness is risen, in fuller display of his person and character. While men keep him in view as their life, they walk in the true light, and live in favour and fellowship with God. If, losing sight of him, they regard religious observances, whether of divine or human institution, as their righteousness for life, instead of using them as prescribed means, by which they are to come to Christ for righteousness, and eternal life through him, they wander in darkness; and if they persist in that course, shall never see light.

It is the Word made flesh, or as manifested in the man Jesus, who had then returned to the Father, after he had finished his work upon earth, of whom the apostle says, “That *was* the true light.” For though this designation belongs to him as the Eternal Word, by whom all things were made, and may be considered as descriptive of what he is *in himself*; yet it is more peculiarly

ly with respect to what he is to *us*, as the Word made flesh, the reconciling Mediator between God and men, that he is here called, “The true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

In discoursing of the subject, I shall inquire,

1. Into this character of *the true light*, given, by way of eminence, to the divine Mediator, and to the plan of grace laid in him for saving the world ;

2. Into the operation and effect of this light upon men, as it is expressed by “lighting every man that cometh into the world ;” and,

3. Lastly, I shall apply the subject in a few inferences.

I. I begin with inquiring into this character of *the true light* given to the divine Mediator. — It will readily be admitted, that *light* is one of those significant metaphors by which the true God is distinguished in the sacred writings. Thus saith the Apostle John, 1 John i. 5. “God is light.” This denotes the absolute perfection, the unspotted holiness, and unbounded knowledge of the one true God. He is light originally and essentially, and in him is no darkness at all. The same designation, when applied to Jesus Christ, leads us to view him, as possessed of proper Deity, “Emanuel, God with us,” uniting in his own person, as Mediator, the two distinct natures of
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God and man; being at once, as the Apostle Jude describes him, Jude, *v* 25. “the great God, and our Saviour, to whom all glory and majesty, dominion and power, belong of right, for ever and ever.”—What a firm foundation is here laid for our faith and hope? We may be well assured that the great undertaking to save perishing sinners, must infallibly succeed in the hands of such a mediator, who is both the Mighty God and the Prince of Peace. — But without enlarging upon this, I proceed to observe,

1. That this character of the true light implies, that from Jesus, as the original living source of light and knowledge, was derived all the light, respecting the nature and will of God, which ever blessed the human race. He is “the Sun of Righteousness,” who, from his own infinite fullness, sheds his enlightening beams upon this dark world. Prophets and apostles were but his ministers to publish to men what they received from him, according to the measure of light with which he inspired them. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” or by the Spirit of Christ that was in them; which spirit, tho’ a distinct subsistence, is so far one with Christ, that he, the Lord Jesus, is said to be “that Spirit,” 2 Cor. iii. 17. And Paul declares, that he learned not the gospel from man, but was taught it by the revelation of Jesus, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and by whom he
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and the other apostles received grace and apostleship; (by the communication of the Spirit, it is true), but still it was from Christ's fullness; as Jesus says of the Spirit, Jo. xvi. 14. "He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."—— This leads to observe,

2. That Jesus, the divine Son of God, standing as Mediator between God and man, is the true light that shines through the whole of revelation. He is the main subject and substance of all scripture, the centre in which all the lines of it do meet: "To him give all the prophets witness." He, in his person, and mediatory character, throws light upon scripture, which gives a consistency to its several parts, — an important significance, and grandeur of design, to what, without reference to him, must appear unreasonable, and unworthy of God.

He is the true light of the historical part of scripture, — of its prophecies, — of its divers rites and sacrifices. The reference which Providence, in all its great actings, had to God's design by him, throws a light, which exalts God in our eye, upon the various revolutions among nations, upon the rise and downfall of empires, of states, and of kingdoms, all manifestly subservient to the rise, to the spread and preservation of his spiritual kingdom.

This extraordinary person, and the very important purpose to be served by him, give a great meaning

meaning to the otherwise unaccountable apparatus of dispensations towards the Jewish nation, the sons of Abraham. When we consider God's separation of them from the rest of the world, the signal interposition of Providence, in a long series of strange operations towards them, as if they were the only people that employed the divine attention and care; when we view this as a plan formed with reference to the Messiah, and for ushering in the promise concerning him with accumulated evidence of its truth,—so that when he should come, the world, in his appearance, might see with irresistible evidence that he was indeed the person promised to come, “for salvation to the ends of the earth;” and that the temporary distinction of the Jews in God's favour, was from good-will to *all* the world, and with a kind intention of equal benefit by the Messiah to all nations indiscriminately;—this places that singular dispensation in a light which highly magnifies the grace and wisdom, the faithfulness and power of God.

He is likewise the true light of the ancient sacrifices; a very unmeaning unreasonable institution in itself, without reference to him. The shedding of the blood of goats and calves as an atoning sacrifice, was such an improbable method of appeasing the Deity, and so remote from reason, that it never could have been imagined by the mind of man, nor find a place in the worship of God, had it not been notified by revelation,

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that

that such was God's appointment. Nor could God have either appointed or accepted them on their own account, as having any virtue or efficacy to expiate the guilt of sin: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin. Wherefore when he, the Son, cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not,—in burnt-offerings and sacrifices thou hast had no delight: then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will." The reference which sacrifices had to Christ, and to his propitiatory death, gave them all their significancy. He is the truth and substance, whereas they were only the shadows, serving as figures of the Holy One promised to come, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Now that he is come, a great High priest, and hath offered himself as the one perfect sacrifice, he thereby hath explained to the world the true intent of the ancient sacrifices; and their design being fully answered in his death, they are for ever abolished.

3. As Christ is the true light of scripture, which gives a consistency to its several parts; so he is the light that shews to men their way to God, and to the heavenly world. In him, as the anointed Mediator, we see our way to God, and the only way in which we are sure to come to him, and to find favour in his sight.

The revelation concerning him, gives knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins, in virtue

tue of his atoning sacrifice. The way to the holiest is consecrated for us, "through the vail of his flesh." In the very constitution of his person, in which the divine and human natures are united, we see our access to God prepared. In the manifest design of the union of the two natures, we see encouragement to hope for reconciliation and union to God in him. But when we see this divine person, as Mediator between God and man, offering himself a sacrifice for sin, and that by the appointment of God; this shews, with fullness of light, that our way to God is open through faith in his blood; — "that having such a high priest over the house of God, we may come with boldness, in full assurance of faith, to a throne of grace." Thus, he is the true light that shews the way, and is himself the only way to God. "I (said he) am the *way*, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me;" and again, "This is the will of him who sent me, that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." Whatsoever leads men to any dependence upon their own works for justification and life, is a *false* light, that leads away from God. Man's vain attempt to establish self-righteousness, doth, under pretence of zeal for virtue, betray the latent enmity of the heart, against both law and gospel. The language of it is, — I am determined to have life (let scripture say what it will to the contrary) in

my own way, by my own works, in my own strength : — I know no other way ; my reason can submit to no other. This self-righteous turn of mind is our natural way, to which, in defiance of revelation, we obstinately adhere ; as it is natural to us, while unregenerated, ever to err in heart, “ not knowing the way of peace,” not knowing God, nor Christ, nor the law, nor ourselves. It must be a stupid conscience that allows a sinful creature so far to over-rate his works, as, upon their account, to expect the favour of God, or to think there is real truth or worth in any work of his that is not done by the Spirit of life from Jesus. — This leads to observe,

4. That he is the true light that gives us the true knowledge of God, or that shews him to us in his true glory. “ No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” As he is invisible to the eye of sense, so is he, in his true nature, hid from the understanding of every one to whom the gospel, or the revelation concerning him, is hid. “ Ye neither know me, (saith Jesus to the Jews), nor my Father : if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also : for he who hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” Jesus, in his mediatory character and work, in his life and doctrine, is the visible representative image of the true God ; or the mirror in which we see the true image of the one God. The light of the

the knowledge of the glory of God, in all its brightness, shines in the face of Christ. In him we see God contriving and acting in a manner worthy of the true God, “in bringing many sons to glory,” by a “captain of salvation made perfect through sufferings.” In him we see all the divine perfections, — holiness, justice, truth, mercy, and grace, all harmoniously uniting, and shining forth in the perfection of their glory, reflecting a reciprocal lustre the one upon the other.

Without the revelation of God in Christ, God is not known. Men pretend to magnify God, by a pompous description of his excellencies, drawn from their own imagination. But it is a partial and maimed account they give of him. In favour of themselves, they represent him as all goodness, and entertain the hope of favour from him as such, while they live as they list. Thus, when they would celebrate God by flattering compliments to his goodness, they rob him of his justice. In hoping for pardon and favour, without regard to Christ’s sacrifice, they presume to repeal the sentence of his law, without any satisfaction in support of its authority. In doing so, they destroy at once God’s law and government : which betrays their ignorance of the true God ; that it is not in him they trust, but in the idol of their own imagination ; for no rational ground of trust in the true God can be seen but in Christ. Should God, in his glorious holiness, out of Christ, be
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presented to mens view, the sight would drive them to distraction. In Christ, God is seen at once, as a just God and a Saviour; —severe in punishing sin, yet gracious in pardoning the sinner; exhibiting the most righteous vengeance upon sin, in the highest manifestation of love to the person of the sinner. Now, God appears to us in his true light. In the Son we behold him shining in the full glory of his grace and truth, and only so we behold him as “the God of hope” to guilty men. In the Son also, and in the design of his mediation, we see the true God, glorious in holiness, in providing, as for the atonement, so likewise for the destruction of sin, and for the reduction of the sinner to dutiful holy obedience. This is the manifest design of the scheme of grace in Jesus. The atonement made for sin is to prepare the way for its destruction: “for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” Upon the plan of the gospel, sin cannot live in him who falls in with it; and upon no other plan can its power be broken and die. The infidel plan of self-righteous men, we are sure, never touches the life of sin. In so far as it disallows the necessity of an atonement, it holds the mortification of sin to be unnecessary. — I add,

5. That the expression may import, that the revelation concerning Christ comes with such fullness of evidence, as is sufficient to satisfy the whole
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rational world of its truth. Besides the high attestation from heaven to its truth, in a long series of astonishing miracles, and in the circumstantial accomplishment of ancient prophecies, its own nature speaks for it, and shews it to be of God, as being worthy of the one true God. It places the nature and perfections of God in such a venerable and amiable light, as must recommend it to the reason and conscience of every sober-minded unprejudiced person.

It is no improper remark, that the discovery of the gospel-scheme of redemption shews it to be of God. The constitution of Christ's person, uniting the human nature to the divine, in order to act and suffer as Mediator for men, is a sublime device, so far surpassing the highest conception of finite created minds, and so honourable to God, that it could never have been known, nor spoken of, in our world, had it not been supernaturally revealed as the mind of God.

It is with just indignation a sober serious person hears a wanton infidel pretending to reprobate revelation for want of evidence. He must be willingly ignorant of it, who sees not the evidence of its truth. Those who have sincerely inquired into the evidence, and who see it to their satisfaction, cannot easily believe others to be serious in pretending, that they want light sufficient to induce belief; but must suspect, that, with this pretence, they

they impose upon themselves ; that pride, vanity, wantonness, and the love of pleasure, are in reality at the bottom of their incredulity, rather than defect of light. What Jesus and his apostles assign as the cause of infidelity, may be depended upon as the true account of it. Jesus says, that men, from love of darkness, and from hatred of the light, which reproves their evil deeds, will not come to the light. The cause of mens infidelity assigned by Paul, being the effect of the former, is dreadful : “ If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them who are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them.” By rebelling against the light, men provoke God to “ give them up to their chosen delusions : ” then indeed, forsaken of the Spirit of God, because of their pride and frowardness, and left to their own counsels, “ they become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart is darkened.” The darkness is in mens hearts, not in the grounds and reasons of faith. For the gospel comes forth, pouring, upon the world, in a flood of light, sufficient to convince and persuade every reasonable soul ; but indulged darkness comprehendeth it not. When revelation is candidly examined, the evidence of its truth is perceived. And if, when its truth is perceived, it is admitted into the heart, it produces great effects in the soul,

as it is said to work effectually in them who believe.

— This leads me,

II. To inquire into the operation and effect of this true light, as it is expressed by *lighting every one that cometh into the world.*

We are not to understand this of the natural light of reason with which we come into the world, and of which the Son of God, who made all things, is the author. It is to be understood of that additional supernatural light, respecting divine objects, with which every man, whether learned or unlearned, possessing strong or weak natural faculties, needs to be enlightened, for his effectual instruction in the nature and ways of God. Nor does this supernatural light mean only the external revelation of scripture, with which God hath blessed the world, but farther, the mighty efficacy of the word, by the Spirit of Christ, to communicate real spiritual light and life to the heart of man, naturally so dark that it cannot comprehend the light of revelation. Without this illumination of the heart by the Spirit of Christ, no man born of a woman, with the best helps nature and education can afford, nor even with the help of scripture itself, can know the Lord, so as to receive his testimony, and submit to him. By the wisdom of learning, the natural man has no great advantage above the unlearned, for knowing the truths of God; so far

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from it, that, of all men the learned, without the light of grace, have, by the metaphysical conceits of false science, contributed most to involve plain truths in obscurity. By the subtleties of converts from among the learned of antiquity, Christianity was first corrupted, and its plain truths, level to vulgar capacities, rendered intricate, ambiguous, and disputable. But suppose one had divine truths laid before him in so clear a light that he cannot fail of perceiving them, each separately by itself, and all of them in their connection together, as he does other matters of speculation ; yet can he not, without the operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart, view them in their true spiritual light and glory.

It is this efficacy of the true light to lighten the heart I am a little to enlarge upon.

Jesus Christ, who is the Lord from heaven, is essential light and life. In his public character of Mediator, he is to us a quickening spirit. His words are spirit and life. The doctrine concerning Christ is attended with spirit and power peculiar to itself : “ Our gospel,” says the apostle, “ came not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost.” — “ The testimony of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” By the word of Christ, there is a real creation of spiritual living light in the soul of man, a creation as real as there was in the beginning by that word, “ Let there be light.”

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The Lord not only commands his truth to be ministered to us, but by it he lighteth the man, while he openeth his understanding to understand the scriptures in their spiritual truth and glory. The great effect of which inward powerful teaching is, that the truth which we formerly heard, and to which our reason gave a cold assent, we now see, and the object to which it refers, in a very different manner. The distant object once laid before us in a dead picture, now becomes present and living in our eye.

The object which the truth of the word thus shews to the heart is Christ, or God glorious in the face of Christ. His wonderful person, character, and work, are so far the substance and end of all scripture-truths, that the true knowledge and sense of them is expressed by “Christ dwelling in the heart by faith,” — and “Christ in us the hope of glory.” When, by means of the word, this glorious object is introduced into the heart, then shines in it the true light of grace.

But, to give a more particular detail of the effects of this light, as it is expressed by “lighting the man,” let it be observed,

1. That it is a light which assures the soul of the truth: “Now (say the disciples to Jesus) we know assuredly, that thou camest forth from God.” “We believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;” as what one sees with his eyes he is most assuredly

persuaded of. How different now is one's knowledge and belief from that wavering persuasion which is founded upon mere human testimony, and also upon the dubious deductions of reason ! It is the assured persuasion of faith, which rests upon the infallible testimony of the faithful God, clearly and feelingly perceived.

They greatly mistake themselves, who think that a doubting staggering persuasion of the truth of revelation will answer the purpose of a religious life, and carry them forward in a patient continuance in well-doing towards glory, honour, and immortality. Absolute assurance is necessary to this. And thus assuredly persuaded is every true believer whom the true light lightens. He sees and believes in the Son of God, that he died for sin ; — that he rose again, and ascended into heaven ; — that he will come again, and raise the dead, and raise his own members to everlasting life. He who believes not thus assuredly, but wavers between certainty, doubt, and probability, is likely to prove double-minded, and unstable in all his ways.

2. When the light of divine truth shines into a man's heart, he sees a great glory in the gospel, — glorious holiness, — glorious grace, — glorious wisdom, in giving a consistency to justice, truth, and mercy, all of them in their highest exercise together. Such glory he now sees, where once he could see nothing to raise his wonder, or to engage

gage his love. The vail being taken from his heart, he views the scheme of grace in Christ as “ the Lord’s doing, and marvellous it is in his eyes.” The light that shines in the believer is of the nature of heaven ; of which it is said, that “ the glory of God lightens it ;” and that “ the Lamb is the light thereof.” In the contrivance of man’s redemption, he sees that God, in devising means for saving sinners, hath at the same time provided well for his own glory, that this great effort of his wisdom and grace is his chief glory, surpassing in excellence all his other works. It fills him with wonder, that the great God should employ such manifold wisdom and grace for the recovery of the wretched posterity of Adam ; and he is lost in amazement upon the first dawn of hope, that the benefit of this gracious scheme is designed for himself. — This leads to observe,

3. That, being enlightened by the Spirit of truth, one perceives his own particular interest and concern in the salvation published to the world through Jesus Christ. This is certainly the effect of the true light shining in his heart, that he sees the Son of God set forth before himself, as well as before others, to take the benefit of his mediation. Although one cannot know, before he believes, whether it be in the purpose of God to save him, or not, it is certain, that when faith enters, he perceives the good-will of God towards himself, in the proclamation of it to all men indiscriminately,

nately, so far as to be encouraged by it humbly to apply to God, and plead for pardon and eternal life through Jesus Christ. In the general offer of salvation, he perceives the invitation of grace so addressed to himself, that he is enabled to reply, “ Behold, I come unto thee ; for thou art the Lord my God.” — This, again,

4. Is the effect of the true light, that as it shews the divine object, the sure path to life with God, and encouragement to the hope of every individual ; so it is powerful to draw the heart in love to unite with Christ. It is an engaging light, in which is seen the highest expression of love, manifesting God to be love, in the manifestation of his Son in the flesh, for the purpose of mens salvation. This view attracts love, and desire of union, to the divine object, most amiable and glorious in the soul’s eye, both in regard to the matchless excellencies of his person, and to his character of Mediator and Surety, for bringing men to God by his merit and power. “ His name, when known, is as ointment poured forth ; therefore do the upright love him.” Our apostle says, “ That he who loveth not, hath not known God ;” which implies, that he who knows God in Christ, must, in seeing, love him ; that love is the natural and necessary fruit of the true light ; nay, that love is itself the light and beauty of the soul ; without which it is all darkness : for this living light from Christ presents him to the heart in
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in the attractive glories of grace and love ; and in doing so, changes the heart into light and love, into the same nature with that light which lightens it ; so that the heart becomes “ light in the Lord.” And therefore the soul, now made light, or “ born spirit of the Spirit,” loosened, by the view of Christ’s superlative glory, from its former attachment to the comforts of earth, naturally tends to the great original and parent of light, to unite with him, as the native element of its new nature, wherein it finds its true rest and happiness. The light that hath not this effect, is not the true light of faith, but the vain illusion of fancy.

It may not be improper to notice here, that this movement of one’s love towards Christ, under the attraction of his love, is ordinarily attended with self-loathing, and much weeping. “ I now see thee,” says Job ; “ wherefore I abhor myself.” Mary, knowing that much was forgiven her, loved much ; and her love wept plentifully. One cannot help being so tenderly affected with that light, in which he sees God so glorious in holiness, and himself so vile by sin ; God so good and kind, and himself so ungrateful and undeserving. — But I proceed to observe,

5. That the effect of the true light, as it is expressed by lighting the man, is, that it relieves him of his distressing burdens and fears : “ They looked unto him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried ; and the

the Lord heard, and saved him out of all his troubles." It lightens the heart, in relieving it of all disquieting fears, particularly of the fear of divine wrath.

So long as one is under the law, or, as the apostle expresses it, "of the works of the law," he is under the curse; and let him do his best, he is never free. The disquieting jealousy of wrath still pursues him; he is never satisfied in his mind, that God is pleased with his performances; but is told by his conscience, that they fall far short of the "perfect law of God," which still condemns and threatens him as a transgressor.

By his religious observances, he may bring his conscience into a temporary peace; but it is the false short-lived peace of a dormant conscience, which, at intervals, awakes from its sleep, and whispers in his ear, that he is yet far from righteousness; that the curse stands in full force against him, and cleaves to him, and to his works. This being ever the unquiet state of his mind, his obedience is with abject servility of spirit. It is unnatural and irksome, in backward peevish compliance with conscience, against the natural bent of the heart.

Now visited with the true light, and made acquainted with the method of reconciliation through the death of Christ, — seeing him set forth a propitiation for sin, — joining himself to him, and
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trusting in him for relief from the curse, which he took on himself, and bore in his own body on the tree, he is lightened of his fears, and joys in God through his Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he hath now received the atonement; singing with the church, “Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.—Behold, God is my salvation!” His conscience now purged from dead works, he serves God with the filial confidence of the spirit of adoption, serene and joyful, in hope of acceptance with God in Christ. — Again,

The heart is lightened in being relieved of the base servitude of worldly lusts, and of the vexing murmurs of conscience accompanying the allowed dominion of sin. Every soul, we are sure, that, in ignorance of Christ, “is of the works of the law,” is under the curse; and, as being under the curse, is under the enslaving power of earthly affections, taking place by turns one of another, in the different periods of life, as our constitution, or the temper of our blood, changes with our years. Such is the slavish, wretched state of every soul of man, till the light of the gospel shine in the heart. Notwithstanding the fairest face of religion and virtue in life, without a living faith in Christ, sin ever lives unmortified in the heart. It dies only by the Spirit of Christ, received by faith.

The self-righteous, while they glory in the

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virtuous efforts of nature, make a pitiable figure in the eye of a serious Christian, who knows, in his very heart, that such boasting is vain, betraying a dead conscience, insensible, both to the extent of God's law, and to the broken state of mens powers. For as Jesus is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," in its guilt; so is he the mighty Son of God, "manifested to destroy the works of the devil." Enlightened with the true knowledge of him, one is relieved of the oppressive tyranny of sin: "He hath crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof; the law of the spirit of life in Christ having made him free from the law of sin and death;" which, before his knowledge of Christ, he could by no means subdue, nor would, from sincere desire.

Now being made free, by Christ, from the vexing servitude of sin, he rejoices in this freedom, as in deliverance from a distracting complication of distempers, and, rejoicing, says, "God be thanked, that I am not what once I was;—that being made free from sin, I am become the servant of righteousness." O the happy peace, the calm retreat from the disquieting tumult of worldly affections, into which I am brought! I am come from discontent and trouble, to my desired rest;—from the delusive phantoms of sensual pleasures, to preferable delight in God, in whose love I inherit substance. This I find to be life and peace;

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as to be carnally minded I ever found to be death, and still find to be shame and grief in the remembrance of it.

In consequence of such deliverance from the servitude of sin, the heart, relieved of its former gloom, is happy and joyful in finding the image of God formed upon it. The chearful light of this image, the distinguished beauty and honour of it, gives the Christian such inward satisfaction and joy, as make his countenance to shine.

The light of it is pleasure rising to transport. As when one comes out of dreary darkness into the chearful light of day; so happy, so glad is a poor sinner translated from darkness to light. It is with joy unspeakable he says, "I was sometimes darkness, now am I light in the Lord." What a happy change is this, — from darkness to light, — a marvellous light, that gives the true enjoyment of life!

How chearful, with dignity of aspect, is he, in finding the beauties of the divine image, the graces and virtues of the Spirit, come in place of the deformities and wild disorders of sin! This is what the prophet rejoices in, when he sings, — "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride

adorneth herself with her jewels." I am now, saith the Christian, glorious within.

He is joyful in the distinguished honour of this spiritual adorning of grace, as being derived from the Son of God, and the true resemblance of him. "This (may the Christian say) is Christ's mind in me;" being "joined to the Lord, I am one spirit with him." O the honour of being "conformed to the image of the Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory!" This must render one precious and honourable in the sight of God. The King must delight in this, his own beauty, though yet but imperfectly drawn upon my soul." Such honour have all the saints, in whom God dwells, as in his temple.

Further, the Christian is happy and glad in the honour of free access to God, and communion with him, through Jesus, by the Spirit. "We (says our apostle) have seen the light that was manifested,—and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."—The duties and ordinances of religion have been appointed for this worthy purpose, that we, enlightened by grace, might, in them, draw near to God, and hold intercourse with him; the mediation and merit of Christ being the procuring cause; our union to him, and his sanctifying grace, being our fitness for such honourable communion. Without it, religious institutions are barren ceremonies, and attendance upon them, a very irksome task.

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The world derides this communion as blind enthusiasm, and all who pretend to it, as wrong-headed fanatics; thus “speaking evil of what they understand not,” and for which they unhappily want a proper temper of mind. Sincere believers know it to be a blessed reality. They have some taste of the hidden manna. Desire and hope of it draw them to ordinances, and engage their frequent serious attendance upon them. Nor are they disappointed of their hope; but find it good for them so to draw near to God;—“that a day in his courts is better than a thousand in the voluptuous tents of sinners.” “How amiable (says a saint) are God’s tabernacles!—how despicable has been my entertainment!—What empty husks have I lived upon, in company with worldly rioters, compared with what I now enjoy, while, “reverently inquiring in God’s temple, I behold the beauty of the Lord,”—I view, I love, and delight in heavenly objects!—Depart from me, ye ensnaring workers of iniquity; I purpose to keep the commandments of my God, and to wait upon him in the tabernacles of his grace, for the pure comforts of his love.”

I add, that the Christian, in perceiving the imperfection of the divine image in his soul, and of his fellowship with God; and in presenting to his view the difficult course of duties and trials he has yet to go through; he is not discouraged, but rejoices in his connection with Christ, his mighty head,

head, who has left no service upon him to perform in his own strength, but has undertaken to be ever with him, by his Spirit to support and bear him honourably through his work and warfare. In this view, rising above discouragements and fears, he trusts, with glorying, in the Lord. "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me. — In the Lord have I righteousness, and in him I have strength. — The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid. — During the course of my spiritual warfare, he will be with me, according to his promise, to strengthen me with might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness."

Finally, he rejoices in the clear light of the word, which shows him, that as the whole of salvation is of sovereign grace, by the operation of the Spirit, through the mediation of Christ; — therefore, when once it is begun in a real change of heart, it cannot utterly fail, nor stop in its progress; but that the grace which has begun it, will finish it; that, as it has laid the foundation, and reared it so far, it will crown it with glory. — The power of God is engaged by his faithful promise, never to forsake the gracious work of his hand, but to sustain and perfect it. The mercy of God, and its fruit in the heart of man, shall endure for ever. Grace, from a small seed,
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shall advance to its full growth and perfect maturity in glory. The tendency of grace is in its nature to this perfection, as it is of the morning-light to shine with increasing brightness to the perfect day. And that it shall so advance, is greatly secured by two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie,—his promise, confirmed by the solemnity of an oath.

Amidst this flood of light, (may the Christian say), light showing my way to God, and the security for my safety and success in that way, have I not good cause to be serene and chearful in this foreign land? What now is wanting to the perfection of my bliss, but (what I have the hope of) complete victory over all enemies, and a triumphant entrance into glory, to see, face to face, him whom I now see darkly as through a glass, in whom, so seen, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?

III. I shall now conclude the subject with a few inferences by way of application.

And 1. From what hath been said, we see, that Christ, and the revelation concerning him, is the only true light in which God is seen, and the way of salvation in his favour. Without this light, the whole world would continue to be the miserable habitation of horrid darkness and cruelty. Those, therefore, who make it their business to malign and discredit this light, are the most pestilent enemies

mies of God, and of mankind. Are they not leagued with Satan, as his accomplices, to establish his infernal empire in the world, to detain men under his power, in the chains of darkness and vice; and thereby to defeat the favourite project of Heaven, for displaying God's highest glory in the salvation of men, by Jesus Christ? Of all crimes, the malevolence of infidelity is the greatest, in crucifying the Son of God afresh, against the accumulated strength of evidence, through a long series of ages. In the guilt of modern infidelity, I may say, there is a degree of perverseness exceeding that of his first crucifiers, the Jews. In opposing revelation, and "denying the Lord that bought them," without the least pretence of serving thereby the interest of civil society and of virtue, men have no cloke, no rational pretence, with which to cover, or to alleviate their sin: they have, therefore, reason to fear, and did they coolly consult with unbiassed reason, they would fear and tremble, at the consequences of their spiteful opposition.

2. From the subject we see, that the mere knowledge and acknowledgement of this truth, (which, we think, every attentive mind must see reason to acknowledge), will not avail for our salvation, if, by the efficacy of the Spirit, it prove not a living light in the heart. Without the knowledge of the truth, the heart cannot be good; at the same time, our sentiments and words may

may be very good and sound, and our hearts not right with God, not a whit the better for our knowledge, but as blind and corrupt as ever, and as much estranged from God as those who never heard of Christ. A man may excel in knowledge and in eloquence, while his heart, in contradiction to his knowledge and good words, runs in its old course of self-righteousness, and “pleasing of the flesh;” trusting in sound opinions, as his righteousness, and “feeding upon ashes,” the fordid pleasures of sense, as freely as ever; void of trust in God, of love to him, and of taste for spiritual objects: he is not, therefore, more a Christian with his knowledge, than he was without it; — “for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, how sound and rich soever his knowledge of the truths concerning Christ may be, he is none of his, he has no part nor lot in him.”

Knowledge is one of the gifts which the Apostle Paul exhorts us to covet earnestly; at the same time, he supposes (what is manifest in experience) that one may excel in it, may speak with the tongue of an angel, may have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and yet be nothing in respect of real goodness. It concerns us, therefore, in the pursuit of knowledge, “to have our eyes ever towards the Lord,” for the light of the Spirit to accompany our progressive knowledge of the truth; without which divine light, our painful study to increase in knowledge, will, like all our

other labour under the sun, prove but vanity and vexation of spirit.

The effect of the living light of the Spirit is, agreeably to the genius of the truth, to lead the heart to Christ as the sole foundation of our hope, not merely for refuge in him from feared wrath, but for entertainment to the soul, by the pure enjoyments of God's love, preferably to the gross delights of sense. For this, the spiritual life in the heart of man leads, in life and in death, to look with trust to Jesus.

3. From what hath been said, we see, that by the utmost efforts of nature we cannot kindle in ourselves this living light. It is the gift of God's grace, the production of his power. We are indeed to exert our best endeavours, to occupy diligently in all appointed means, in order to its production; and one fit and likely mean for obtaining it, is frequent serious meditation upon the truths concerning the person of Christ, his mediatory character, and his humble obedience unto death for our redemption; in which view of him, we will see the deplorable state of human nature, which rendered this method of salvation by grace through Christ necessary. To meditation upon this affecting subject, we are to join prayer, (as indeed a sense of inability to fix our thoughts calls us to pray), that God, in mercy, may send the truth with quickening light into our hearts.

And as the ordinance of the Lord's supper exhibits

hibits the Son of God offering himself, in man's nature, a sacrifice for sin ; which propitiatory sacrifice is the ground-work of the scheme of grace, the root upon which flourisheth all its fruit ; it is therefore a special mean, fit in itself, and greatly desired by lively Christians, for increasing and strengthening the spiritual life. And by those who have life in them, and, in the exercise of it, reverently attend upon the ordinance, Christ's flesh and blood, represented in the sacramental symbols, are found to be meat indeed, and drink indeed.

S E R M O N V.

The influence of faith upon religious fortitude.

H E B. xi. 27.

— *For he endured as seeing him who is invisible.*

IN this chapter the apostle presents us with a magnificent display of the triumphs of divine faith, while he brings upon the field the army of the saints, atchieving, by faith, deeds unequalled in glory by the boasted exploits of all the infidel heroes, either of ancient or of modern times.

The particular instance of heroic faith which the apostle celebrates in the passage before us, is that of Moses, the Jewish lawgiver, a man “mighty in words and in deeds.” This illustrious person, relying upon the promise which God gave to Abraham, that after four hundred years he would put his posterity in possession of the land of Canaan, “refused to be called the Son of Pharaoh’s daughter,” and “forsook Egypt, not fearing the
wrath

wrath of the king : *for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.*"

Of all the bodily senses, *sight* is the quickest, and most distinct ; and therefore the term *seeing* is here very properly used, to express the clear and satisfying perception which Moses had of the being and perfections of God, by the spiritual eye of an enlightened understanding ; for thus only is the invisible God to be discerned. And by this spiritual eye of faith, one has a persuasion of the reality of his existence, and of the glory of his perfections, as assured and infallible, as he can have by the eye of sense of the existence of any material object that is placed fully in his view. By such a sight of God Moses endured ; by the like sight of God are we also to endure.

It is for want of this settled unwavering persuasion of unseen things, that some, after they have, with warmth of affection, sprung forth towards heaven, and endured for a while, faintly give back, falling down the stream, along with the prevailing course of the world. They set out with a brisk fall of passion, kindled by an imaginary representation of the heavenly joys ; but the evil heart of unbelief, still remaining the same, in the hour of temptation breaks from its temporary restraint, and, according to its natural bent, " departs from the living God," in the vain pursuit of earthly things.

It will readily occur to you, that *enduring* necessarily

cessarily supposes trials to be endured, painful trials, which require both the exercise of patience, and the exertion of strength.

I shall therefore, in further discoursing upon these words,

1. Give some account of the trials and temptations to which the Christian is exposed in a present world ;

2. Explain what is meant by *enduring* them ;

3. Shew the influence of faith, or *seeing him who is invisible*, upon the Christian's fortitude in *enduring* trials and temptations ;

And conclude the whole with some practical improvement.

I. I begin with giving some account of the trials and temptations to which the Christian is exposed in a present world.

“ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” said David. Some may have a larger share of them than others, but suffering is the common lot of them all. Through many tribulations they must enter into the kingdom of heaven ; and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall, by the wise appointment of God, suffer persecution in one kind or another.

“ Wo to them who are quite at ease in Zion,” meeting with nothing in their religious course to molest them, with no difficulty or danger to engage their violent struggle to surmount it. These
seem

seem not to be called to the kingdom of heaven ; for “ the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

It were endless to enumerate the various evils which afflict the just. They may all be comprised under the few following heads, which will serve to give a general view of them. As,

1. The restless motions, suggestions, and solicitations, of indwelling sin, of unbelief, of pride, of concupiscence, of remaining corruption in all its rebel passions, and the perpetual conflict between it and grace in the soul. This of itself is a most acute affliction, which makes the life of a Christian a life of tribulation, of solicitude and fear, of sorrow and sighing. It is an irksome burden, the occasion of painful exercise, of many bitter complaints and tears in secret, to every gracious soul ; and the more so, that this conflict is not merely between corruption and conscience, but also between corruption and a spiritual heart, that delights in God, and in his law ; and therefore cannot easily endure the sight of that hateful enemy, which, with deceit and violence, opposes itself to the life of God, which thwarts, entangles, and retards it, in all its aims and movements towards God. Paul’s complaint of this body of death was not peculiar to him, but is common to all believers, who, to their shame and grief, carry this troublesome inmate in their bosom, ever contending with it, till death release them from it and
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the earthly tabernacle together. Whoever feels not these contrary contending principles within him, "as it were the company of two armies," and finds it not difficult to endure and maintain the contest, appears not to have in him the grace of God.

2. The snares of the world, which fall in and co-operate with inherent corruption, to the prejudice of the soul. These are of two kinds, some of them enticing, others terrifying.

Those of an enticing nature are the blandishments, the soft alluring delights of the world, which address, flatter, and deceive the senses and imagination, being adapted to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." Various are the seducing objects of the world, which minister to the gratification of these passions. I shall only notice, that as there is a promptitude in corrupt nature to snatch the bait in these forceries of the world, so the enchanting invitations of pleasant companions, the insinuating charms of social entertainment, give efficacy to the temptation, and are of dangerous influence to ensnare us into a partnership with the voluptuous in their excesses.

Other temptations of the world are of a terrifying nature, being the effects of the hatred of the world. See a rhetorical enumeration of them in the following part of this chapter; all fit to work upon our fear, in distressing us with the removal
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of every desired comfort, and with the presence of every afflicting evil.

The tempting scene begins with cruel mocking, reproach, and scorn, for refusing to comply with vain men in their revellings; men who deem it strange that you run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you for that abstemiousness which justly merits esteem and praise. It is not unusual for sober persons to be reproached for what is their glory, by sottish sensualists, who, in defiance of the first dictates of reason, make their belly their god, and glory in their shame. It is not easy to endure this temptation. Too oft it prevails with soberly-disposed, but irresolute souls, not yet firmly rooted in the truths of the gospel.

But from reproach, the hatred of the world proceeds to still more violent measures, which deprive us of our goods and lives. The enmity of the serpent against the seed of the woman knows no bounds: as it finds opportunity, it rushes on to the last extremity of cruel persecution. With this dreadful calamity the saints, in every nation, have been tempted. It is not yet a century since it raged in our own land. And before this “generation shall pass away,” the bloody scene, instigated by a Popish Antichristian spirit, may return to try us. Many worthy persons, who are most attentive to the operations of Providence, have a strong impression of some severe vi-

sitation at hand. This is not to be scorned or neglected as a blind impression, unsupported with reason. It is raised by the present evident symptoms of God's anger, compared with the usual forerunners of very afflicting judgements in former times. Read these, at your leisure, in Math. xxiv. — I glance at two of them, flagrant among us; namely, fervid heart-burnings, convulsions, and divisions in church and state. And among individuals, every species of dissipation and riotous excess; such as prevailed in the days of Noah, when they were eating and drinking, giving unbounded indulgence to their bodily appetites, with fearless contempt of God's awful threatenings, and repeated warnings given them of the impending flood. "He that runs may read" the formidable presages of judgements hastening towards us with dreadful steps. "Scoffers, who, walking after their ungodly lusts," give no attention to God's word or providence, may despise these fears as the bugbears of superstition and fanaticism: but, for all their wanton derision, the end of our present peace and liberty may be at hand. — The commissioned destroyer of the Gentiles may even now be on his way. One thing is manifest to every one that knows and fears God, that the general way of the world at present, (no class or order of men excepted), must be highly displeasing to the supreme ruler of the universe, who cannot behold iniquity, and hath
revealed

revealed his wrath from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.

3. The saints have to endure the temptations of Satan. The deadly weapons he employs against us, are our own inbred corruptions, and the allurements of the world. By insinuating himself with these, and stimulating them, he pushes us on to sin and destruction. He skilfully adapts his temptations to the principles of our nature, flattering our inclination to pleasure, to pride, and vanity; so seducing us to his service, under colour of serving ourselves. Thus he addressed our mother Eve. With her, though innocent, he prevailed. And with such fly baits he presumed to assail our Lord himself. In playing off his temptations upon him, he found nothing of his own in him, but such a fulness of God, as rejected with indignation, and resisted with power, all his temptations in the wilderness; which, by the way, contain the several heads of all his insidious methods with men to this day. “Upon him, indeed, the foe did not exact;” but in attacking us, he finds much within us of his own to favour his deceits. Hence it is, that the enemy has ever observed one uniform method of tempting, with little variation: and though this be on record in scripture, and in the memoirs of many saints, he continues to succeed too well by them, to the ruin of myriads of mankind, and oft to the wounding of God’s people, though never to the final destruction of any of them.

For giving efficacy to his temptations, addressed to the passions, he applies all his craft to the weakening or subverting our faith. This he sometimes does, by misrepresenting the goodness of God. He would persuade us, that all good is not to be expected, and no evil; that even the evil threatened, is not to be dreaded. Thus he undermined Eve's faith; barefacedly affirming, in contradiction to God's express threatening of death, "that she should not die." At other times he represents the justice of God as inexorable, "allowing no place for repentance," affording no hope of recovering the favour of God, upon falling into sin, after confession and submission made, especially after engaging by vows to be the Lord's. He suggests, "that now there remains no sacrifice for our sin:" and by thus working upon the timidity of our unbelieving hearts, for driving us into despair, he discourages all endeavours, in the use of means, to save our souls, and exasperates the heart against God. By the subtilty and violence of his suggestions, enforced by the authority of maimed citations from scripture, he prevails against believers so far as to perplex and dishearten them for a time. With reprobates he prevails so far as to take from them all hope. His first attempt is to lull the sinner asleep in his presumptuous confidence. When conscience, instructed and awakened, declares against this false rest, and urges the necessity of deliverance from sin, by the blood

blood and grace of Christ, he so artfully manages the terrors of the word, that the tempted sinner cannot believe, but sinks in fullen despair. And, (which may seem strange), after 'one is reduced to dark mistrust, which, instead of killing sin, does but fret the heart against God ; when the anguish of mistrust abates, as it gradually does, and the love of sin revives, with some sense in conscience still remaining ; then the tempter, tossing the sinner from one extreme to another, draws him back to his former state of presumptuous hope, in which he continues more at ease, while conscience is soothed with the regular observance of religious forms, and with the flattering hope that he shall, some time hereafter, gain that power over his corruption, which he cannot, or rather will not now exert. With this complicated deceit he is detained, in a state of guilt and wrath, till he die,—dying with the perishing hope of the hypocrite. — Again,

Satan tempts, by raising persecution against the church. It is then “ he goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” He goes forth, “ having great wrath,—breathing death and slaughter.” And succeeds too well with many unstable souls, not grounded and settled in the faith, whom, by the terrors of torture he frightens from their profession,—“ drawing away the third part of the stars of heaven, casting them to the earth,—and slaying many of the saints,”

while

while the remaining faithful that escape the general carnage, flee into the wilderness, where God prepares for them a place of safety, and feeds them for a time. — But,

4. The saints have to endure trials immediately from the hand of God ; by his mysterious actings towards the outward and inward man, — too hard for the utmost stretch of human thought to explain into signs of love. Such were his strange methods with Job, in laying his hand with singular severity, upon his substance, upon his children, and upon his person, rendering him at once poor, childless, desolate, and diseased ; at the same time withholding from his soul the divine comforts he once enjoyed. Such also was God's trying dispensation towards David, in permitting him, for many years, to wander in jeopardy of his life, from Saul's persecution, which oftentimes put his faith to a stand. So he tried Abraham with his strange command to sacrifice his only son Isaac, the child of the promise. I may add, the discouraging trial to the woman of Canaan, by the Lord's frowning answer to her humble request, by which he would seem to cut her off from all hope. By these methods, inexplicable to reason, God tempts ; not according to the common acceptance of the word : " For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." He only trieth the righteous, as a refiner and purifier of silver. He searches them thoroughly for bringing forth what is in their hearts. But from
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his trying methods, which have the appearance of anger and neglect, unbelief and corruption take occasion to tempt the soul to break off from God, “and to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience ; saying, in fretful language of one unbeliever, “This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait any longer?”—and of another,—“Curse God, and die.” This vexing fiery temptation gives occasion to the vigorous struggle of faith to endure it, without faintly yielding to it. And it is peculiar to the noble grace of faith, supported by the arm of Jehovah, to withstand its violence, and rise superior to it : the powers of nature, in their utmost exertion, being, of themselves, too feeble to maintain the combat. — This leads to shew,

II. What is implied in enduring them.

1. With regard to the troubles of life, (which I chiefly consider here in the light of temptations to sin), to *endure* these, totally excludes the idea of Stoical apathy, or insensibility to pain ; and supposes a painful sensation of them, difficult to bear. For where there is nothing to give pain or disquiet, there is nothing to be endured. It is the poignant pain, caused by any afflicting dispensation, that proves the temptation to sin, and this temptation gives edge to the affliction.

Nor does it express a mere passive state of mind, that stoops under its burden, and tamely suffers
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the temptation to take its course, without any active resistance made to it. To endure, implies exertion, so as firmly to stand one's ground, to maintain trust in God, and to cleave to him in the steadfast pursuit of duty, from which the temptation would turn us aside. The temptation solicits and urges to actual sin, thereby aiming a deadly blow at the soul; to ward off which, the soul must be active in using the whole armour of God, especially the shield of faith. Temptation in its nature, admits not of a supine or merely passive state of mind. One must either be active in resisting it, or yield his consent to it. There is no medium: As, when corruption solicits, the only part then necessary for one's safety is, not a tame suffering of its outrage: he must be active in resisting it by faith, by prayer, and other means. When Paul complained, "that he did what he would not," was he then merely passive? was not his soul steadfastly active in believing? was he not fervent in praying, when he broke out into the exclamation, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me!" He must necessarily have been so, or led a willing captive by sin.

Thus, in respect of all temptations, for defeating their pernicious tendency, our faith must exert its vigour in collecting all its forces of scripture-arguments, — hold them forth to the temptation, and plead them, in ardent prayer with God. It is the nature of the life of God in the soul, animated

mated with hope, thus to rise against its hateful enemy, that would destroy it, in turning it aside from God. — I add, that to endure, expresses,

2. Resolution and strength of mind to withstand temptation from inward corruption, from the blandishments, the soft allurements of the world, and also from the terrors of it. It requires strong resolution to resist the soft deluding temptations of the world, whether they arise from solicitations of corruption, urged with the flattering promises of pleasure and profit, or from the insidious persuasions of worldly company, who tempt our compliance with them, in their excesses, by fair professions of regard and friendship. To elude the last of these, and to meet them with the Psalmist's expression of noble resolution, — "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, for I purpose to keep the commandments of my God," is not easy to achieve. And perhaps, to withstand this insinuating kind of temptations, requires fortitude in a higher degree than is necessary to face the more terrifying ones. Many have fallen by the enchanting firen charms of worldly delights, who have braved the fire of persecution. It is our attachment to these sensible delights that makes the terrors of the world prove such a dangerous temptation to our nature. How soon these may attack us, we know not; when the wrath of man shall threaten us with the loss of peace, of liberty, of ease, of all our worldly goods, and of our lives.

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These are evils terrifying to nature, a shock too strong for natural courage to sustain. It requires supernatural strength to bear up against them, without departing from God, and from duty. Such courage fortified Nehemiah's soul, when a report was brought him of a secret plot to slay him; thereby to discourage his heart, and weaken his hands, in God's work. His noble reply to the report was, "Should such a man as I flee?" or stoop to any dastardly method of saving my life? No; I will not desist from the work; I will stand to my post. — This forbids not, in some circumstances of danger, to provide for our safety by flight. It is our Lord's instruction, "when we are persecuted in one city, to flee to another." Prudence must come in to guide our resolution; it otherwise degenerates into obstinacy and fool-hardiness.

3. To endure implies *patience*; which may be taken for resolution and strength of mind in continuance, to sustain the shock of temptation in general, without faintly yielding to it: or, with respect to troubles and calamities, it expresses that temper of mind which bears the irritating provocation in them, with calmness of spirit, and steadfast attention to duty. This patient spirit operates towards God and man, and extends to our thoughts, words, and actions, so as to suppress hard thoughts and murmuring complaints of God's severity, and wrathful expressions of resentment.

ment against men, who may be the instruments of our trouble; quietly submitting to the dispensation as the wise and righteous appointment of God. Such government of himself David maintained, under temptation from his son's rebellion, and Shimei's railing. In both he, with meek submission, regarded the trial as from God; praying that he might be delivered from men, who were his hand to chasten him. This view of affliction influences patience.

To endure is to wait upon God with meek submission, in hope of a favourable issue to the trouble, in his own time and way, without wearying of God's correction, or running to unwarrantable methods of relief. It is to bear affliction with habitual uniform patience, in the general course of one's life: I say, in the general course of one's life; for it doth not always exclude occasional fits of anger, and peevish discontent. When trouble rushes upon us in surprise, or lengthens beyond expectation, with increasing weight, it is too apt, in our present state of imperfection and frailty, to ruffle and unhinge our minds. Such was its effect upon Job. Though still his soul was habitually patient and submissive; yet the stroke falling upon him suddenly, and being repeated with increasing severity, it made him stagger.

A remarkable instance of this occasional frailty, joined to true goodness, we have in Jo-

nah ; who, notwithstanding repeated fits of unaccountable anger and peevishness, which looked like the frowardness of the wicked, yet, in the greatest extremity, exhibited a conspicuous example of the humble submission and meek resignation peculiar to a gracious soul, when he says to the mariners, most humbly acknowledging his offence, and accepting the punishment of it, “ Take me up, and cast me into the sea ; so shall the sea be calm unto you ; for I know, that for my sake this storm is upon you.” If he was angry beyond what became a saint, he also shewed such humble submission to God, and unrepining acquiescence in his rebuke, as none but a great saint was capable of. This should teach us, not to draw one’s reigning character from the unavoidable frailties of his peculiar constitution, but from the nobler qualities of grace, which, amidst those blemishes, we may behold exerted, and shining with a bright lustre.

I add, that to endure habitually, is to endure with persevering patience to the end : “ We have need of patience, that, after having done the will of God, we may inherit the promises.” Many seemed to have run well for a time, who, fainting in the middle, or toward the end of their course, have lost the prize. After having withstood and surmounted one or more sharp rencounters, the attack still pressing on, and the enemy continuing and varying his artful

artful methods of deceiving, (as he did with our mother Eve), at length, wearied out with incessant attacks, they faintly yield the cause to the urgency of the temptation. “Consulting with flesh and blood,” they forsake Christ, “and walk no more with him.” Demas, for a season, seemed “to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;” but having loved this present world, and his fleshly ease, after having taken a few turns, with a goodly appearance, in conflict with persecution, he wearies of the fatiguing service of the gospel, and declines going along with Paul, “as his companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Christ.”

Many promising appearances in youth, blasted by the pleasures and cares of life, have degenerated, and ended in the deformities of a worldly voluptuous conversation. Awakened by some slight influences of the spirit of the gospel, to sharp convictions of sin, to ardent desires, and hopes of an imaginary heaven, men set out toward it with great forwardness; but these fair blossoms, blighted by the malignant influence of temptation, die away, before they have ripened into the fruit of faith and a new heart. Upon which these false-hearted professors return to their old course of sensuality: “Having begun in the spirit, they end in the flesh,” and perish. Only those who attain to genuine divine faith, and
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are united to Christ as the branch is to the vine, have strength to carry them on to the end: "And they who thus endure to the end, shall be saved."

We shall have a fuller view of these points, while I illustrate,

III. The influence which seeing the invisible God has upon our enduring the evils of life. —
But this shall be the subject of another discourse.

S E R -

S E R M O N VI.

The influence of faith upon religious fortitude.

H E B. xi. 27.

— *For he endured as seeing him who is invisible.*

THough the faith which the apostle celebrates in this chapter be the sedate exercise of a reasonable soul, in its highest elevation; yet is it not merely the result of man's reasoning faculty, or the mere conclusion of natural reason, built upon the external evidence of the truth of revelation. This kind of faith, wrought out by the strength of natural reason, if it rise not, by the Spirit of God, to something (if I may so express it) intuitively luminous, is not sufficient to bear up against the temptations of the world. Many, of the clearest and strongest understanding, have this kind of faith, so firmly laid in principles of reason, that it has some effect upon their consciences; and yet, for want of that true divine faith, which, by a due fullness of light, subdues and rectifies the heart,

heart, they continue slaves to some base lust, and are carried away, by the torrent of the world, into the most shameful excesses, as if they were one with the common herd of reprobate infidels; whereas those poor ones, who cannot reason as these do, yet, by the power of divine faith, break through troops of enemies, trampling upon temptation in their way; the feeblest among them being, as David, “strong as an angel of God.”

The faith that renders us thus victorious, is that which sees the invisible God; which not only sees the satisfying rational evidence of the truth, but apprehends the divine object itself, God Almighty; and in the light of his glory, sees the infallible evidence of the truth of the gospel. In seeing him, one perceives, with satisfaction to his reason, to his conscience and heart, the gospel-plan of salvation to be so worthy of God, so expressive of his glory, that it removes all doubt of his testimony in it. So abundant, so powerful, is the flood of evidence, in this view of God, that one easily admits the external proofs, without laboured reasoning; and will not suffer his faith to be shaken by the frivolous objections of infidels, started from the seeming contrariety of scripture-doctrines to reason, or a few seeming historical inconsistencies, and little chronological obscurities, owing to our ignorance. By these captious conceits, he will no more be tempted to question the truth of the gospel, than he can doubt of the real existence

ence of any object he sees with his eyes, though his reason cannot fully account for it; and marvels at the affected blindness and perverseness of the wise and prudent, who stumble at little difficulties, magnified, by sceptical wits, into important objections; but which disappear, and are lost in a bright train of substantial proofs, pouring, in fullness of light, upon the eyes of the unprejudiced. Abraham might object to God's commandment to him, to offer up his son Isaac, as being repugnant to reason; but seeing the invisible God, and perceiving his authority, in hearing his voice, he hesitates not to obey. — Again,

This faith, expressed by *seeing*, speaks its assurance, the highest assurance, of the truth of the object, of its reality and glory: An assurance essential to the faith of every true believer, amidst all his misgiving doubts about his own state. It is for want of this assured persuasion of the infallible certainty of the object, that many are carried away by the deceit and violence of temptation. Which shews, that, for standing firm against the various assaults of temptation, absolute certainty with respect to the truth of divine objects is necessary. This certain feeling persuasion keeps a serious upright soul humbly waiting for God in the dark, till light and comfort come.

It is proper to add, that this seeing of the invisible God is a purely spiritual, intellectual sight of God, who is a pure spirit; in nature and excellence,

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infinitely removed from, and exalted above every thing that is visible, as well the sensible signs of his special presence, as the graven idols of the nations. When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses, in a flame of fire, out of the midst of the bush, and God himself called unto him; in hearing his voice, it was a different object Moses perceived, from the symbol of his presence in the burning bush. The sight is not the less real, nor the less evident, that it is not sensible.

The medium by which we thus see God, is the word of scripture, which proclaims his glory. This shews it to be a spiritual sight; that it is in hearing and understanding his voice, and perceiving his wondrous glory in what he declares concerning himself, we see him. As, when God spake to Moses out of the burning bush, it was then he saw, with his understanding, the invisible God; an object quite distinct from the flame of fire, visible to his bodily eyes: so we see God in the word, beaming in upon the conscience and heart. We behold him in the doctrines and promises concerning Christ, the image of the invisible God, in whom alone we see him for the encouragement of hope, decked with awful and amiable glory. For, out of Christ, no man can see God, and live: but, in “the Word made flesh, we behold the brightness of his attractive glory.” In the Son, we see him as our own God, shewing himself and his good-will towards men; and giving

ving us the spiritual eye of faith for this very end, that in seeing him in this engaging light, we may confidently trust in him as our God in Christ; and thence derive comfort and strength to bear with patience and resignation all the tribulations of this mortal state.——For illustrating this argument, we have, in a former discourse upon the text,

1. Given some account of the trials and temptations to which the Christian is exposed in a present world. We have,

2. Explained what is meant by enduring and bearing up under them.——We now proceed, as was proposed,

III. To shew the influence of faith upon the Christian's fortitude in enduring these trials and temptations, "by seeing him who is invisible."——And,

1. Faith hath this happy influence, as it preserves and deters from sin, and of consequence disarms trials and temptations of their main strength, by seeing God to be glorious in holiness, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, who commands a becoming distance from the most perfect saint. Thus, when Moses saw the Lord in the flame of fire, he heard a voice calling to him, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." From this view of the holiness of God, sin appears in all its vileness, and full of terror, as a transgression of the divine law, and diametrically opposite to the purity of the divine nature; as dishonouring to God, and ruining to the souls of men. And

in this glass too the best of men may perceive their own deformity. Hence *Iſaiah* cries out, “Wo is me; for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” In like manner speaks *Job*, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” The believer, under such impressions of his own unworthiness, can no longer endure that wicked thing to dwell in him which God’s soul hateth, but flees from it as his worst enemy.

When sin would court his embraces under the most enticing form, he replies, with just indignation, “How can I do this great evil, and sin against God?” Should the temptation suggest, that the darkness of the night would cover him, faith fixes the mind upon the omniscience of God, from whose all-seeing eye nothing can be hid, to whom darkness is as light. Thus the snare is broke, and he escapes. If sinners entice him, he consents not; knowing that tho’ they may roll their unlawful pleasures for a while as a sweet morsel under their tongue, they will prove the gall of asps within them, and the end thereof shall be death. If he is reproached for the name of Christ, and made the song of the drunkard, and the jest of the scorner, he endures this trial of cruel mockings; being assured, from the word of truth, that the Spirit of God and of glory shall rest upon him; and that great shall be his reward in heaven. If
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his lot is cast in those unhappy times wherein iniquity is established by law, and his obedience required under the severest sanction, he answers as the Apostles, when commanded by the Jews, not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, “Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” In short, when a wicked and persecuting world appears in all its terrors, to move him away from the hope of the gospel, faith causes him to triumph in the firm persuasion that the God whom he serves, will deliver him out of the hands of all his enemies. In these, and other respects, he, by seeing the invisible God, as glorious in holiness, is enabled to maintain his steadfastness amidst all the frowns and smiles of a present evil world.

2. Faith’s view of God inspires with confidence and resolution to encounter every trial and temptation,

As it discerns the agency of God in all our trials ; that no affliction can happen to us but by the direction and the disposal of his over-ruling providence, Amos iii. 6. ; Isaiah xlv. 7. Oft, indeed, men are brought to trouble by their own folly, by their ungainly temper, by their indiscreet management, by their prodigality and injustice. Under suffering from such causes, a guilty conscience must damp confidence toward God, and cause dejection of spirit. But it strengthens for suffering with serene composure, to think, that what we endure is the lot measured out to us by the sovereign will and wise appointment of God : “ Let none suffer

suffer (says the Apostle Peter) as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy body in other mens matters. Yet if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."—"Let them who suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing."

Again, faith greatly fortifies our resolution, as it assures us that God himself "is with us" in whatever trials he calls us to endure. It was this that fortified the spirit of Caleb against all discouragements: "Their defence is departed from our enemies; the Lord is with us." It was this that roused the sinking courage of Joshua: "Arise, go over this Jordan; as I was with Moses, I will be with thee; I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." It was this persuasion that confirmed the resolution of the three children, and of Daniel, to meet with such unshaken constancy the rage of the fire, and of the lions: "Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us; and he will deliver us." In all your afflictions, O Christian, hear your encouragement from God: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." From these and the like promises with which the Bible is stored, of the divine presence in all our trials and temptations, the suffering Christian may rest assured, that the watchful eye of his God and Father will ever be towards him for good, and particularly in giving him the special influences.

influences of grace to save, to refine, and prepare you for rest and glory. In this persuasion of faith, we will endure with resolution, yea with joy rising to exultation of spirit; and, without it, we must sink under our burden, and perish by mistrust, in adversity.

3. The faith which sees the invisible God, and the methods of his wisdom and grace in the light of revelation, influences to endure, with persevering patience, both the conflict with indwelling sin, and with the various tribulations of life. That the followers of Christ should be afflicted and exercised all their life with remaining corruption, every Christian knows to be the wise appointment of God, for the purposes of his own glory, in the manifestation of his forbearance, his faithfulness, and his power, and for the greater joy and triumph of his people, in the issue of their warfare: and therefore, though he fights, in pain, for deliverance from the bondage of corruption, he is not discouraged, nor in despair; but rejoices in hope of victory; being secure of the continued succours of divine grace, promised to be sufficient for him. Under his painful conflict, when his steps are ready to slide, his courage revives, in hearing the voice of God,—
“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished,” *If. xl. 1. 2.*
—— Again,

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With respect to the calamities of life, the believer, in seeing the invisible God, sees him to be the one true God, who made all things, and rules them ever by his power; and who, in the whole conduct of his providence toward his people, acts up precisely to the terms of his covenant; — that, according to its gracious tenor, in faithfulness he dispenses troubles; — that every affliction, for kind, measure, and duration, is by his disposal; — that it is oft his way, for wise purposes, with increasing weight to draw out the affliction to a considerable length. Thus he left his people to be afflicted, for many years, in Egypt and in Babylon; tho' he could easily have delivered them sooner.

The term fixed for the duration of the trial, he is pleased to conceal from his people, for exercising their faith and patience. In this view, faith, without presuming to prescribe to God, dutifully submits to his will, and quietly, in hope, waits for his salvation; persuaded, that when reason is puzzled with the intricacy of his way, he does all things in the best manner, for his own glory, and for the improvement of his people in every gracious and virtuous disposition. In apparent extremity of danger, when the visible course of things has a threatening aspect upon the church, and seems favourable to the enemy, affording them matter of triumph, while the children tremble; faith looks, through these dark clouds, to God himself, “seated on his holy hill of Zion,”
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wielding the sceptre of universal government, and conducting all events (even when, in his actings, he puts on terror) perfectly according to the settled plan of his wisdom and grace ; — holding the impotent attempts of his enemies in derision ; causing their wrath to work his praise, in accomplishing his purpose, for the correction and salvation of the church, and for their own utter confusion ; Habb. i. 12. In this view, faith says of the enemy, amid their sanguine exulting hope of success, in the language of Micah iv. 12. “ They know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel ; for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.” — When the wicked boast that they act wisely, in devising methods for wearing out the saints, faith hears God saying, — “ I also am wise to confound their measures. — I have seen the affliction of my people. I am come down to deliver them.” It sees, that the increasing violence of the enemy, does but hasten the church’s deliverance, as it raises her louder complaints, and more fervent supplications to God : and therefore says, in the darkest times, “ I will wait upon the Lord, who hideth himself from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.”

Though faith sees not the precise time that shall put a period to the trial, it sees that certainly deliverance shall come ; “ for surely (saith God) there

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is an end, and thy expectation shall not be cut off." It sees also, that God will bring the Christian out of trouble, with signal advantage and improvement of his spiritual state,—"I know that when I am tried, I shall come forth as gold;" and that glory shall be the happy issue of it:—"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them who love him.—Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This says, that afflictions are, in part, the methods by which God forms his people for heaven; and that the greater their present sufferings are, for righteousness, the greater shall be their future glory. Hence those honoured with martyrdom, for the testimony of Jesus, stand arrayed with distinguishing glory in the heavenly world. And I may venture to say, that next in distinction to the army of martyrs in glory, shall be those of rank in this world, who, amid the temptations peculiar to their high station, keep themselves unspotted from the world, and still preserve their integrity, their purity, and pious devotedness to God.

The transcendent excellence and happiness of this glory, is the clear vision and full fruition of God in the glorified Mediator. The various ingredients,

gredients in the heavenly felicity, are, by the Apostle John, summed up in this one expression. "And they shall see his face." Thus, in seeing the invisible God, we see him as our God, who will be "our everlasting light and glory,"—our great and never-fading inheritance; as when Moses saw him, and heard him say, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob," the God, whom these your fathers, now in a separate state, enjoy; "for he is not a God of the dead, but of the living." And to every one who truly believes, he says, as to Abraham, "I am thy shield and exceeding great reward." All who see him by faith, have, in this dawn of divine light, the sure pledge of "seeing him, ere long, face to face." How must this hope influence to endure patiently, and to "wait for the vision, which, after a little while, shall surely come, and not tarry!" In view of God, as our sure everlasting portion, how frivolous must appear all sublunary delights in their nature and duration! how light the afflictions of time!—Blind, alas, to God, and to the great realities of the life to come, the greatest part of mankind unprofitably disquiet themselves in pursuit of the fugitive vanities of time. To secure freedom from sufferings here, and to live in honour, in affluence and ease, is their only care.

“O that vain mortals were wise, and would consider their latter end.” Would we be persuaded to bestow serious thought upon God and eternity; did we bear upon our minds the image of this world passing away, and of the other with its great concerns, ready, in the amplitude of their glory, to open to our view! what manner of persons would we be?

Did we oft represent to ourselves the world dissolving, on the one hand,—and on the other the glorious appearance of the supreme judge,—the solemn state of his person,—the wondrous pomp and splendor of his train,—cherubims and seraphims innumerable doing homage to him as their king:—did faith realise to us the universal silent attention to the loud-sounding trumpet, which will shake the pillars of heaven, and pierce the inmost caverns of the earth;—the dead rising from their graves;—the judgement set;—the books opened;—the equal administration of that last solemn process, “which shall separate the sheep from the goats,” and adjudge them to their respective states, for eternity;—the heavens rolled up as a scroll;—the earth and all its works burnt up, and flaming in one great conflagration;—the saints, in bright array, and their Lord upon their head, ascending up to the third heavens, with wonderful shouts of triumph; while the wicked,

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with dolorous shrieks of extreme anguish and despair, depart into infernal darkness and torment :

In contemplation of this astonishing complicated scene of ineffable joy and terror, how little must appear the paltry affairs of this life,—the riches, the pleasures, the pomp, and power of this world? Did we conceive and believe, what it is to dwell with God;—what happiness reigns in heaven, beyond any thing the saints ever enjoyed, or felt or imagined, while here; O what would we not endure and do, to have our lot, our permanent mansion, with God's ransomed ones! How patient, in this hope, would we be of sufferings! Yea, how joyful in tribulation!—How strictly sober!—How fervent and frequent in prayer!—How circumspect and watchful! How zealously active, to glorify God, as the way to his kingdom!—And if we thought upon the absolute purity of the heavenly state, how should we feel the necessity of holiness in heart and life, of walking humbly, by faith, with God, in order to our possessing that inheritance of the saints in light, “which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and passeth not away.”

APPLICATION.

- i. From this subject, and from experience, we learn,

learn, that troubles and temptations are appointed for us, in our way through this life to heaven. We must resist and overcome them, or perish in the wilderness. We may not pretend, in excuse for sin, that there is no avoiding of temptation. True, temptation is unavoidable; but is it irresistible? is yielding to it unavoidable? The heart of him who says so is a secret friend to the temptation. He pretends a necessity to sin laid upon him by temptation; but it is a necessity rather from inclination. Should an enemy attack your life, and you were provided with every advantage for making resistance; would you thus excuse yourself from exerting your force to repel the hostile attack?—Would you say, “It is vain to attempt resistance; my enemy is too powerful for me:”—Would you, with this pusillanimous excuse, tamely surrender your life to the will of your foe, who you knew would not spare it? Temptation aims at your life. You must overcome, or be slain by it. In overcoming you shall live, and inherit all things. — Again,

2. It is by faith we overcome; faith that respects God in Christ, and Christ as our righteousness and strength. This faith is our victory. We cannot pass through the snares of the world with our life, but by it. It is God indeed, by his mighty arm, that supports us; but then it is by means of our faith.

faith “taking hold of his strength, and leaning upon it.” Thus God succours, animates, leads, and guides his people. This faith “is of God’s operation,” and becomes a living active principle in the soul. Without it one’s “bow cannot long abide in strength.” Under the restraint of instruction, or of a temporary commotion of affection, “we may endure for a while;” but by and by, the heart, if not purified by faith, will resume its natural bent; as Jehoshaphat did that which was right all the days of Jehoiada the priest, but his instructor being dead, he soon returned to the natural course of his unbelieving heart. If all the saints in heaven and earth should, with their utmost care, watch over the unregenerate heart of one sinner, sooner or later it would make its escape from God, and find an opportunity of returning to its old haunt. No guard can keep the heart, but the grace and Spirit of God inhabiting it. And not only must faith be in the heart, but it must be active in cleaving to God, in pleading importunately with him for succours. In this way we overcome, and in no other. If we have not faith in Jesus, with it to ward off the attacks of temptation, we cannot prevail; we must fall by the darts of the wicked one. Thus Israel could not enter the good land, but perished in the wilderness, because of unbelief. Saul, having no power to be-
lieve,

lieve, sunk under his distress, and, in abject despair, fell upon his sword : whereas David's faith carried him onward, though with some staggering, through all his dangers, fighting and conquering to the end of his course. — Therefore,

3. We must keep faith in constant habitual exercise. Moses endured “ as seeing him who is invisible ;” that is, by continuing to contemplate God, he continued to endure. We must have “ our eye ever toward the Lord,” for the renewed supports of his grace. We are never, in this world, above the necessity of using our armour, because we are never above danger from temptation. After many comfortable interviews with God, and many signal victories obtained over our foes, we are not to be secure, as if all danger were over. The enemy continues to way-lay us, ever waits for our halting, and fails not to seize his opportunity of overthrowing our steps.

It ministers important instruction to the church, that Solomon, after the Lord had appeared to him twice, and spoke much encouraging comfort to his heart, should so grossly, and so long, have been misled, “ sinning in that very thing concerning which God so solemnly commanded him.” This warns us of the necessity of constant dependence upon God ; that we are never to intermit “ the fight of faith,” but to continue it till we have

have fought it out, putting off our armour and the body together. And it is this, probably, among other causes, that moves the dislike of the world at a life of faith, that it is a laborious life, requiring the constant “girding up the loins of our mind;” the continued, painful, but pleasant exercise, of thinking, of considering, and looking up to God, to Christ, to the covenant, and to the promises, for continued succours of grace from them. — In order to this,

4. Keep the eye of faith ever clear. This is necessary, as we cannot make one regular step in the Christian life without it. In these two ways we are to keep it clear: *1st*, by restraining indulgence to sensual pleasures, and by abstracting from the cares of life.

The pleasures of sense darken the eye, and vitiate the taste of the soul. The inordinate cares of life have the same effect, distracting, distempering, and drawing away the heart from God. We must, therefore, avoid immoderate indulgence to the one, and engaging unnecessarily in the other.

They are not to be envied, but pitied, who spend their time and substance in a continued round of voluptuous entertainments and dissipating amusements, thereby to keep God and eternity out of sight. How insipid their present enjoyment of life, as they have reason to howl for the miseries coming upon them!

2dly, We keep the eye of faith lively and bright, by guarding against sloth and security, which is to faith what sleep is to a living man. It shuts the eye, that, though it has a natural capacity of seeing, we can no more exert it, while drowned in sleep, than he who is wholly destitute of the faculty. And while the Christian thus sleeps, the enemy sows his tares: he has a great advantage against him, to rob him of his strength, and to deliver him up to “hurtful lusts:” For keeping the eye of faith awake, we must guard against sloth, by being ever usefully employed in one duty or another. There is no spiritual indisposition of which we are in greater danger than sloth. Rest is sweet to our nature; it insensibly steals upon us; and once we are sunk in it, we incline to take our rest, to fret at being disturbed in it; and we may sleep on till “the midnight-cry awake us.” Advert, therefore, when slumber begins to creep upon your spirits, and, to prevent its progress, instantly run to action.

Our care to abstain from these blinding evils must be habitual, being all day long in the fear and love of God. Think not that with safety you may indulge excess occasionally now and then, since you make it not your daily practice, but are for the most part sober and abstemious. This is to play fast and loose with conscience, and wantonly to counteract the Lord’s express command: “Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged

vercharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life." To imagine, in contradiction to this, that you may, innocently, on occasions of business with company, make free with the rules of moderation, cannot be the dictate of grace, but of sly corruption. Your own heart finites you for it, and accuses you of insincerity. And should there, consistently with this duplicity of conduct, be in you a living root of grace, it must be hid from you; its comfort must be withdrawn; and by the rebukes of God, you shall smart for your false perfidious behaviour. Never pretend to trust in God for any favour or comfort out of God's way.

Lastly, To your watchful care to observe these directions, join daily fervent prayer. As abstinence from the pleasures and cares of the world, and from torpid sloth, is necessary to keep the soul in a proper frame for prayer; so prayer is necessary, and contributes greatly, to fortify against these ensnaring evils, and to keep faith alive and in vigour, as it is itself the breathing of faith. By prayer, if rightly gone about, we draw near to God; we converse with him; we contemplate his glory. And thus, accustomed "to behold his glory," with reverent familiarity to converse with him, we grow in faith, in joy, and peace. We receive influences of grace from him, to support, to encourage, and strengthen us to advance in our Christian course.

These things are recommended by scripture for saving our souls : this makes them necessary. Nor ought it to be deemed too great labour for obtaining the heavenly inheritance. Whoever thinks so, and thence gives himself little trouble about salvation, he shall come short of the prize, and see his mistake when it is too late, too late to arise and go forth to meet the bridegroom ; so that when he expects to enter in with him into the marriage, he shall find the door shut. Which deplorable disappointment of our hope, may God, of his infinite mercy, prevent. *Amen.*

S E R -

S E R M O N VII.

On the joy of the Lord as our strength.

NEHEMIAH, viii. 10.

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

UPON hearing the words of the law read, the people mourned and wept. Through excess of fear and grief, their hearts seemed to be discouraged, and their hands weakened, for the work in which they were engaged. And who can hear the voice of God's law, demanding perfect obedience, and the awful sanction with which it is fenced, without trembling for fear, from consciousness of guilt, and even sinking into despair, if not relieved by the comforting voice of mercy?

Nehemiah and Ezra raised the people from their discouragement, with words from God full of all consolation. They check their sorrow, and call them to joy in the Lord, saying, "Mourn not, nor weep, neither be sorry; for this day is holy unto the Lord your God."——With these words they stilled the people, restored their drooping spirits,

rits, and sent them away chearful, and well heartened for the work.

Thus the fearful of heart and sorrowful need to be healed and strengthened with comfort, to have straight paths made for their feet. They will otherwise be in danger of being turned out of the way,

The people to whom these words were first addressed, had a weighty work on hand, and great difficulties to discourage them in it ; so have we. Their work was a warfaring work ; so is ours : and we, as they, need to be strengthened for it, by joy derived from the Lord : “ For the joy of the Lord is our strength.”

In discoursing of these words, I shall shew,

1. What this joy of the Lord is ;
2. How it is our strength.

I. I begin with considering what this joy of the Lord is.

It is that joy which arises in the heart, from the views God gives of himself in his word, properly apprehended and applied by us. — Let us then attend,

1st, To the joyful views God gives of himself in his word ;

And, *2^{dly}*, To the manner in which these views are to be improved and applied by us, so that our hearts shall feel joy from them.

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As to the views God gives of himself in his word, they are such as are fit to diffuse joy and transport through the whole habitable earth, yea through all the upper and lower regions of creation. The prophet, in publishing peace and salvation by redeeming grace, summons heaven and earth to sing and to rejoice: "Sing, O heaven, and be joyful, O earth, and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted."——The law clothes God with terror, which takes from man all hope of favour. Now, upon the interposition of a divine Surety, having put off the frowning face of rigid vengeance, he exhibits himself in the mild attractive light of pardoning grace, such as affords hope to a whole guilty world, being terrible only to obstinately-impenitent sinners, who will not be saved.

The wisdom of God, set on work by boundless grace in our favour, has found a way of relaxing the rigour of the law, with great honour to its authority. In harmony with this plan of grace, his name laid before us, as it is proclaimed by himself to Moses, is, "The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth;" and with a still clearer discovery, in the new dispensation, of the way in which he is propitious, through a satisfactory sacrifice, he is designed, "God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself."

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The human race, through the first man's transgression, being under guilt, and the sentence of death, by the law; and fallen man being no more able, by any means in his power, either to prevent the execution of the sentence, or to relieve himself from it; God, at once to save the sinner from perishing, and his veracity and justice from reproach, calls the Eternal Word, his Son, to undertake as Surety for helpless man; to become responsible to the law for his guilt and penalty, and also for that perfect obedience to which he stood bound: and in order to his fulfilling all this, according to law, he calls him to become man, to assume human nature into personal union with the divine, so as in these two natures to become one person. — The Son agrees, and yields obedient to his Father's will. Being sent of the Father, he comes forth, made of a woman, made under the law, subjected, in man's room, to its whole requisition, for his redemption.

Engaged as Surety for men, he must act for them, as priest, to offer sacrifice, even the sacrifice of himself. "What the law could not do, what all its burnt-offerings and sacrifices could not do, God having sent forth his Son, to be an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." His death was a sufficient condemnation of sin in our nature, a sufficient vindication of God's righteous law, a full compensation for the injury done to it by sin. Now the obligation to punishment upon
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the believing sinner is dissolved ; the penalty is discharged : “ The just died for the unjust.” — “ There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” Hear your pardon proclaimed from heaven : “ Deliver him from going down to the pit ; I have found a ransom. — Be it known to you, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. — Ye are called to joy in God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom you have received the atonement.” — As, by his obedient sufferings, he obtained our freedom from the curse, so, by his perfect obedience in terms of law, he gained our title to life ; therefore, instead of death, the wages of sin, God’s gift to us now is eternal life, through Jesus Christ, in whom is life, as his purchase for men. — Again,

Man having lost the divine image, and the recovery of it being necessary to qualify him for the enjoyment of God, his all-sufficient Surety is charged, not only with the redemption of man from guilt and punishment, by suffering, but with the restoration of his degenerate soul to holiness. He gave himself for our sins, that he might sanctify and cleanse us, and present us to himself a glorious church. And as he is charged with this, as a part of his undertaking, so is he well furnished for it, the fullness of the Godhead being lodged with him in his mediatory character, to

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be employed by him for our purification and salvation.

Thus, when God calls us to his kingdom and glory, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; when, as it becomes his majesty, and our rational nature, formed for obedience to him, he calls us to have respect to all his commands; to fight our way through the world, in the various exercises of grace, and in the performance of manifold duties, against manifold difficulties; this he requires of us, not in our own strength, nor for gaining thereby a title to life; but tells us, that we are to carry on all our work, in dependence upon the Redeemer, who is designed “the Lord our righteousness and strength;” and is our *strength* in consequence of our justification, and the recovery of our title to life by his *righteousness*.

He is indeed our strength, without whom we ought to attempt nothing in God’s service, and can do nothing, Jo. xv. 5. Being engaged by his office, and by his promise, to make his grace sufficient for us to every good word and work, he does all in us and for us. Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians equally concerns every Christian: “Work out your own salvation; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.” When thus encouraged, and employed in the great work to which we are called, in a constant dependence on the strength of Christ, all is well; God is glorified;
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our souls are saved; and every one, like the Ethiopian eunuch, “goes on his way rejoicing.”

In the mortifying prospect of the body’s returning to its original dust, how joyous the hope God in Christ gives in his promise, that immediately at death, the spirit, disincumbered of the body, shall be admitted to the beatific vision of God in paradise; and that at length the body shall be raised, wonderfully transformed into a glorious, spiritual, active body, to reunite with a perfectly holy soul, both together to live with God, in endless fullness of joy, unmixed with pain or fear.

The certain evidence and sure pledge of all this, is the resurrection of Jesus from the penal death he suffered for our sins; his entrance into heaven, as our forerunner and great high priest, to continue his intercession for us, till all God’s Israel, whom he hath foreknown, are saved; when, as he hath promised, he shall come again, to redeem them from the grave, and to bring them to his Father’s house, to be there for ever happy with himself, in beholding his glory.

Such are the gladdening views we have of God as a just God and a saviour. It gives real joy to a gracious heart, to see God glorious in the exercise of justice, while he holds forth a sceptre of grace to guilty rebels. It is this view of ample provision made for the honour of justice in the plan of grace, that draws a serious soul to settle upon it, with confidence, satisfaction, and joy.

God's way is all grace to us, while he is severely just in exacting our debt of the Surety. He indeed insists upon our holy obedience and good works, because he wills us to be good and happy like himself; but he insists not for obedience, according to the strict tenor of the original law of righteousness, perfect personal obedience to be wrought out from our own natural powers, and that for life, as it is described by Moses, — "The man who doth these things shall live by them." Life to us, by such a law, is now become absolutely unattainable. God's voice in the gospel is very different, it is such as suits our lapsed state: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and trust in his perfect obedience, as your righteousness, for your justification, and acceptance with God. Trust in him for life to form you to holiness, and to carry you on in a uniform course of obedience, till you are fitted for glory. And the same faith by which we trust in the Surety, is of God: "By grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Thus, our righteousness, our holiness, our obedience, are all to us of God's grace, who reconciles, subdues, and conforms us to himself, by Jesus Christ; and hence, while he displays the awful glory of justice, in exacting our ransom of the divine surety his Son, he, at the same time, appears, in his way with us, to be all mercy and love. Both these views representing him in the most engaging and encouraging light
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to sinful men, the publication of the glad tidings they bring, is designed to give joy to the hearts of all the human race who hear them. But they are few who derive joy and hope from them, because few, upon due attention, admit them into their minds, and retain them as subjects of serious deliberate thought. Many attend upon the ministry of these things: in hearing, they understand them. They allow them to be true; at the same time they carelessly let them pass with a cold assent to their truth, in common with other matters wherein they have no particular concern. They cannot, therefore, feel any intimate joy from them; but only such natural entertainment, as the mind's natural appetite for knowledge receives, from intelligence of things in general, be they earthly or heavenly, real or imaginary. — Let us then attend,

2dly, To the manner in which the views God gives of himself, in his word, are to be improved and applied by us, so that our hearts shall feel joy from them.

It is obvious, that for being raised to spiritual joy in the Lord by these delightful views of him, one must hearken to them, so as, in his heart, to perceive them to be the infallible, important truths of God, without any staggering uncertainty about them. Accordingly the people are said to have gone away to make great mirth, because they understood the good words which were declared unto them by Nehemiah

miah and Ezra, and believed that they were the words of God.

But this general belief is not enough. One must perceive his own personal concern in these discoveries of a reconciled God, that they are laid before him in particular. For drawing his heart to God, he must hear the word speaking to himself thus : “ The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, which he publishes to the world in general, this word of salvation God sends to you, in particular, preaching peace to you by Jesus Christ.” It is come to your ears, for an encouraging ground of hope to you. If the word is not so heard, and regarded as a ground of hope to one’s self, but only acknowledged as true in general, it is heard without effect. Our hearing of it profits not, because it is not mixed with faith.

Again, As, in hearing, one apprehends these delightful views of God exhibited to him for the encouragement of his trust ; so also, for feeling joy from them, he must actually trust in God on these grounds. He must give credit to the words of God, and in hope venture his salvation upon God’s faithful testimony in them ; agreeably to which the Apostle says to the Ephesians, “ in whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” Whatever speculative knowledge we may have of these sacred divine truths, if we do not receive them with that cordial believing assent, which leads us
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to rest and trust in them as the ground of our sure hope, the words of the God of truth who cannot lie; we, in place of joy, will feel nothing but self-condemnation, the cutting remorse of an accusing conscience, because we have not believed the record of God, in relation to ourselves, "that he has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son." Sorrow and dejection are the inseparable attendants of unbelief; whereas trust and rejoicing in God, go hand and hand together: Pf. xiii. 5. "But I have trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation:" Pf. xxxiii. 21. "For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name."

Farther, To attain comfort from these views of God, one must, in trusting, fall in with the scope and design of the truth, by yielding himself, without reserve, to Christ, to be crucified with him, to be formed by his grace into a holy temper, into a heavenly active life and conversation. The faith that influences to renounce sin, and to serve the living God, is the faith that purges the conscience from dead works, that gives the answer of a good conscience towards God: being justified by such a faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of his glory. When the word came to the Thessalonians with power, this determined them to become followers of the Apostles, and of the Lord, in a course of holy obedience and patient suffering. It was then they are said to have received

ceived the word, in much affliction from the world, but with joy in the Holy Ghost. When, upon receiving clear instruction, which removes every doubt, one believes and submits to Christ, to be washed by him from sin, and to be governed by his will, it is then the soul rises to hope, and to rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. We cannot otherwise have the testimony of conscience for our rejoicing. It is a false hypocritical faith, which encourages us to rejoice in God, while it allows us to continue in sin. The joy which such a faith inspires, is no better than the laughter of fools, in midst of which the heart is sorrowful. Of all delusions it is the strongest, and of most difficult cure. When one is so intoxicated with it, that the repeated wounds made by sin are no more felt; when conscience is benumbed, and its chidings no more heard; this looks like a judicial plague upon the heart, that shall not be healed.—
Once more,

For deriving joy from these views of God, one must have personal experience of their powerful effect upon his own heart. It may indeed be said, that this experience is implied in what we have already spoken. And, no doubt, in the apprehension of these views, by the light of faith, which assuredly persuades us of their truth, which relieves from disconsolate darkness and perplexing doubts, which changes the heart from the love to the hatred of sin, and to the love of God
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and holiness, there is an experience of the distinguishing loving-kindness and power of God, which doth rejoice the heart. But to this I may add farther, the experience of comfortable access to God, by faith and trust in Jesus Christ;—sensible intimations of his favour;—real fellowship with him in the duties and ordinances of religion, in the reciprocal actings of love between God and our souls;—experience of comfort, of relief and deliverance from straits, from trouble and temptation, in answer to prayer, which makes the heart to rejoice: Ps. xxviii. 7. “The Lord is my strength, and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him.” Such experience is justly regarded as a clear evidence of one’s reconciliation to God, and of God’s special favour and regard for him: it raises to full assurance of hope, that God is for him as his God and friend; and thus fills his heart with joy and peace, breaking forth in these words of exultation and triumph, “I can now joy in God through my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom I have received the atonement.—My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoiceth in God my saviour.—His grace hath regarded the low estate of a sinner ready to perish. He that is mighty hath done for me great things indeed, and holy is his name; and his mercy is on them who fear him, from generation to generation.”—These particulars will receive a further illustration, while I shew,

II. How the joy of the Lord is our *strength*, which was the second thing proposed in the method.

Now the joy of the Lord is our strength in the two following respects : 1st, As it fortifies the mind against those perplexing fears, arising from the demands of the law and its awful threatenings, which would crush us with their oppressive weight, and render us equally unfit either for acting or suffering in the service of God ; and, 2^{dly}, As it inspires resolution and fortitude, both for discharging the various duties of the religious life, and for enduring the great fight of afflictions to which we may be called.

I. The joy of the Lord is our strength, as it overcomes those fears which arise from the demands of the law, and its awful threatenings :

When the people heard the words of the law read, conscious that they had done wickedly, and incurred the displeasure of God by transgressing it, they went in discouragement of heart, and would have perished in despair, had they not been revived and comforted by the messengers of God bringing them tidings of peace. So, when we hear the voice of the law, “ Do this and live,”—and, “ Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them ;” conscious that, by innumerable instances of transgression,

gression, we have confirmed ourselves in the guilt and curse under which we were born ; and that it is absolutely impossible for us to come up to the terms of the law for life ; where must such conviction and fear issue, but in utter despair, had we not other views of God than the law presents us with, even bright views of grace through Christ, sufficient to free us from its terrors ? In fear of the pit opening to receive the guilty soul, how relieving to hear the joyful sound of grace, “ O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help ! ” In God, who justly threatens thy destruction for sin, is thy help. “ I am merciful, saith the Lord ; there is forgiveness with me, and plenteous redemption for the chief of sinners.” How comforting and strengthening to the heart, to see God, even in executing justice, exercising mercy ! How quieting to the awakened conscience, which insists, as well as the law, for satisfaction to justice, to hear God saying, “ Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom ! Behold the Lamb of God. — Behold my Son sent forth in the likeness of sinful flesh, made an offering for you. — The just dying for the unjust, to bring you to God. — Believe in the Lord, Jesus. — Seek refuge from wrath in his righteousness. Bring the obedience of the Surety in answer to the demand of the law. — Trust in him, and in my promise of pardon and life through him, and thou shalt be saved.”

The once fearful soul, hearkening to this report of grace, and returning answer to it by faith, is relieved of the fear of condemnation by the law, and can, with strong confidence, repel its charge : “ Who shall condemn ? it is Christ that died ; and died a sacrifice for sin, by the appointment of God. Being now justified by faith, I have peace with God ; his anger is turned away from me, and he hath comforted me : Behold, God is become my salvation, my strength and song ; I will trust and not be afraid.” If the law and conscience should return to urge upon the soul the charge of guilt and condemnation for old sins ; or if, upon involuntary instances of misconduct, fear should arise that the pardon obtained was only for sins that were past before believing, and not for those committed since ; the answer is ready, the answer that silences all challenges from law and conscience, and fortifies the soul against the terror they would raise : “ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin ; I have fled to it for redemption, and there is no condemnation to them who are in him ; for in virtue of his one perfect sacrifice and everlasting righteousness, there is forgiveness of the sins that are past, and full security against the believer’s relapse into condemnation, though through the power of temptation, and the remains of corruption, he may wander for a while from the paths of righteousness. He who walks not after the flesh with a willing mind, but after the Spirit in the general course and tenor of his life, can, against every challenge

challenge for old and later transgressions, keep up his confidence in God, by looking unto Jesus, and relying on his all-atoning blood. Ever maintaining faith in Christ's righteousness, he may even maintain the firm persuasion that his iniquities, however many, and however great, shall be for ever blotted out. In this assured hope, he is called to rejoice all the day, and in God's favour shall his horn be exalted.

But this, say you, is the ground of my fear and distress, that I shall not be able to keep the faith, and hold out to the end. Let such hearken to the many strengthening cordials which are to be found in the sacred records, against these unbelieving fears. There you are assured, upon the authority of God himself, that if your faith be of God's operation, you have in his promise the same security for its never-failing duration, that you have for the end of it, the salvation of your souls, namely, that God is faithful, by whom you have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, and who shall therefore confirm you unto the end; that ye shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; that Christ, who is your Advocate with the Father, and whom the Father heareth always, prays for you, that your faith may not fail. Nor is this all: for he, as your Surety, has become bound to hold you in his own hands, that ye may never perish, but have everlasting life. Of whom then shall ye be afraid?

afraid? Shall the enemies you must encounter, or the length and difficulties of the way to his kingdom and glory, disquiet your minds with anxious solicitude, when you hear him saying, “ My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest ? ”

Among many stumbling-blocks and discouraging fears which at first deter from entering on a religious course, and from becoming the professed disciples of Christ, one is, the fear of being left to make shipwreck of faith, to be a reproach to religion, and double our guilt by apostasy. The animating view the scriptures give of the covenant of grace, of the strong security in it for the perseverance of faith, and for continuing by faith in God’s service ; this, when suggested by the Spirit to the wavering irresolute mind, yet halting between two opinions, will overcome the fear of falling away ; and, against its most plausible objections, draw the soul to engage with Christ. When the Spirit whispers these alluring words to the timid lingering heart : “ Fear not, I the Lord have called thee by my name ; and thou art mine. I have betrothed thee unto me for ever, in faithfulness and tender mercy. Be not dismayed, I am thy God ; I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. This is the covenant I will make with you, I will not turn away from you to do you good ; and I
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will put my fear in your hearts, that you shall not depart from me." The soul to these encouraging words of grace, rising above all fears, joyfully replies, "Behold, I come unto thee; for thou art the Lord my God." — Let us now consider,

2. How the joy of the Lord is our strength, as it inspires resolution and fortitude for discharging the various duties of the religious life, and for enduring the great fight of afflictions to which we may be called.

When we believe and rejoice in the glorious displays above mentioned, exhibited to us in the gospel, concerning the great God our Saviour, the God whose we are, and whom we serve, such views of him, as full of mercy and truth, must necessarily quicken and animate us in the work he has given us to do; especially when we consider,—the nature of the work itself,—the end for which we are called to work,—the assurance we have of divine aid to support and carry us on in it,—the promise of the pardon of our daily failures, and the acceptance of our persons and imperfect services in Christ the beloved.

The work itself is in its own nature well calculated to inspire with desire and resolution to continue and advance in it. What is this work? It is the work of universal righteousness, comprehending the inward exercise of all gracious dispositions, faith, hope, love, meekness, and such like; together with the external expressions of them, in sobriety,

fobriety, justice, and mercy, in the practice of all relative and devotional duties : An arduous work, indeed ! but honourable and glorious, suited to the original dignity of our nature, which raises the mind to a resemblance of God himself, and thence the source of the purest joy and delight. What is said of societies in general, is applicable to individuals in particular : “ Righteousness exalteth a nation ; but sin is the ruin and disgrace of a people.” How hateful, how despicable, the character of the wicked ! “ whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame ; who mind only earthly things.” But O how amiable and excellent the character of the righteous, who, rising above this world, “ has his conversation in heaven ; and, by a patient continuance in well-doing, agreeable to the law of his God, seeks for glory, for honour, and immortality ! ”——From this view of the work of righteousness, the work that is given us to do, so honourable, so reasonable, so delightful, the believer rejoices in it more than in all riches : “ O how do I love thy law ! It is my meditation all day long, sweeter to my taste than honey, than honey from the comb. I will observe it, I will keep it continually.”

Again, we derive strength for our work, from the consideration of the end for which we are called to work ; not for life, in terms of the original law, “ Do this and live ;” but, from life by Christ,

Christ, from the influences of his grace, to the support and advancement of the divine life in our souls. Being called into the fellowship of Christ by faith, we are in him intitled to eternal life; and being quickened by his Spirit into newness of life, we walk after the spirit, go on towards perfection, till we arrive at the heavenly world, where God commands the blessing, even life for evermore. The disposition wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost, to walk uprightly, and work righteousness, the natural acting of a renewed soul begun to be saved, is part of the salvation itself, and necessary, by forming us into a confirmed habit of holiness, to fit and qualify us for that complete salvation, that life and happiness with God, for which we are designed.—— From whence it appears, that good works are not the cause, but the effect, of life and grace derived from Christ, who is in all respects our life, our living head. What is our work of righteousness, but the consequence and improvement of the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free from the condemning sentence of the law, and the most direful effect of the curse, the enslaving dominion of sin? Loosed from our bonds, enlarged from prison, we walk at liberty; go up chearfully to Zion, as the children of Israel when set free from their captivity. And I need not say, that a felt willingness, an inclination to work the work of God, must necessarily excite us to do it with all

our strength and mind. Thus, when the people understood the law, and found themselves disposed to observe it, they justly regarded this as a token of God's favour, and were animated by it in their work.

Encouraged by a sense of our liberty to walk in God's ways, we will go on in them, in grateful returns for our great deliverance; this course of holy obedience being necessary to please and glorify God, our deliverer, by exemplifying in life the godlike effects of his grace, by shewing before the world, that his workmanship upon us is such as does honour to a holy God. — But the objection recurs, "Though I am not required to work for life, yet it being necessary to salvation to work righteousness, the cause of fear and discouragement is still the same." — In answer to this, let it be further observed,

That in the promise of every thing that is necessary for enabling us to go on in the work of God, *is our strength.*

God prepares the soul for his work, by inspiring it with a principle of divine life, by taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh, upon which he writes his law. Thus we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. By being made partakers of a divine nature, a foundation is laid for us to proceed upon in the improvement of holiness, and in the performance of every duty: for the result of the
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new creation by grace is a disposition to do the will of God in all things, in contradiction to the will of the flesh. Having thus prepared us for his work, he will ever after carry us on towards perfection, by his Spirit put within us, causing us to walk in his statutes. The infant seed of grace ever needing to be quickened, supported, and strengthened, by continued influences; these influences are vouchsafed, so that no duty can prove too hard for us.

God will both shew us our way, and give us resolution to advance in it, against all discouragements.

In some intricate cases, we may be at a loss to know what is duty; but God can make our path plain before us; and he hath promised that he will do it, Pf. xxv. 9. "The meek he will guide in judgement; the meek he will teach his way." And again, *ψ* 12. "What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall chuse." Now one is greatly emboldened to his duty, when he clearly sees the way in which God would have him to go. A wise man is strong, and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. — In giving the knowledge of duty, the Spirit inspires the heart with resolution to do it. He does so by keeping up a sense of God's supreme authority, and also a comforting sense of his love in Christ. This sense of God's love, kindling love in the heart, will constrain and enable us to do all things for Christ. Without love many duties will be omitted, and every

duty will be an irksome task ; but love kept alive will carry us on willingly and resolutely in the most difficult instances of duty, ever rejoicing, should we suffer reproach and contumely, bonds and fetters, from a persecuting world, for the sake and testimony of Jesus. With such encouragement from grace, we can do all things through Christ strengthening us. We can rise superior to all difficulties in the way of duty : “ As our day is, so will our strength be.” Not one thing is required, but what is also promised. All is so far of grace to us, that Paul ascribes nothing to himself, though he laboured more abundantly than all the apostles, but ascribes all to the riches and freedom of divine grace.

Perhaps, in examining your present strength, you may find it insufficient to bear you out, with that unshaken constancy which others have maintained amidst heavy trials. But if you have strength for the duties, and against the trials of your present situation, you may confidently hope, that, when brought to more trying circumstances, your strength shall then be proportioned to your burden. — You may indeed say, “ Notwithstanding these encouraging aids of grace, I am far from coming up to the perfect rule of duty. I do no work to the satisfaction of my own conscience. What coldness and deadness of spirit, what mistrust, what vanity and wanderings of mind, mingle with my prayers and all my other duties.”

duties." — But in answer to all these complaints, I have one effectual ground of encouragement to mention, namely,

The promise of the pardon of daily failings, and of the acceptance of our persons and imperfect services in Christ.

Believers in Christ are not under the law, in its rigid form, as it was given to Adam; but they are under grace. This, however, is not to be understood, as if the law was abrogated or lowered in its demand, to make way for a new indulgent law, requiring sincere, though imperfect obedience, for life. No; the law, being holy, just, and good, not one tittle of its high demand shall or can be dispensed with: it must have its full requisition. This it has had from Christ, the Surety; and this it has from the believer, not personally, but in the Surety. The Lord Jesus was made under the law, and bound, in our nature, to satisfy it for us. The sinner, called into his fellowship by faith, becomes one with him in law, and, in him, is absolved from the curse of the law, and its rigorous demand upon him. He can answer all its claim, by pleading the satisfaction of his Surety in his room. He is no more under the law, but under grace, or under the law to Christ, his sponsor; which is a law of grace, of spirit and life; according to which he can warrantably plead for the full pardon of sin, and for the continued progress of a work of grace
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in his heart; that as Christ has undertaken, he may fulfil *in* him the work of perfect righteousness, as he hath already fulfilled it *for* him. The believer's work, then, is not a work for obtaining life; it is a work of grace, begun and carried on by grace; which, as the effect of the travail of Christ's soul, and the fruit of his obedience, must be preserved, and go on to perfection. No sinful defects, therefore, can stop its progress, nor disappoint the believer's hope of life. He can with equal confidence plead for the continued pardon of sin, and the continued progress of a work of grace, both being equally the purchase of Christ's blood.

The encouragement arising hence is, that if you find your heart turned to Christ, as all your hope; if you find it turned from the love of sin, to the love of God, and of holiness; if you can say with Paul, "I trust I have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly, or prevailingly inclined to obey God, though I cannot attain to perfection, but evil is present to withstand and hinder me;" yet if you yield not to the solicitations of sin, but cry earnestly to God for help against it; then may you with certainty conclude, that a work of grace is begun, and that God will never forsake this work of his hand; that, as sin is pardoned, so it shall at length be destroyed, and your victory over it be complete through Christ. For thus runs the covenant of grace: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them

them in their hearts. I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

O how relieving and encouraging is it, under a sense of sin, and fear of wrath, to hear these words of grace ! " I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wert called a transgressor from the womb ; but, for my name's sake, will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off."

It only remains to be shown, that the joy of the Lord, or the comfortable experience of God's favour and love, is the *strength* of the Christian to support him under sufferings of every kind.

I might observe, by the way, that *temptations* may be reckoned among the sufferings of the Christian ; and among these, the most dangerous, because the most insinuating, are those which arise from the blandishments of sense. — For repelling such, our chief strength is derived from experience of the purer joys of God's love, and communion with him ; to which sensual indulgences are repugnant, and of which they tend to deprive us. Fear of losing these sweet comforts, that fill the heart with gladness, will fortify the mind against those fugitive illusions of fancy. And indeed, if our delight and joy, in prayer, and in other devotional exercises, have not the effect to deaden our relish for earthly things, our seeming joy in God is beyond question all delusion, the mere overflowings of the animal spirits ; which
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may indeed gratify the appetites of the body for a season, but can yield no satisfaction to the more noble and exalted powers of the mind. — But, passing this, I shall confine myself to what is more commonly understood by *sufferings*, namely, those painful trials to which the Christian is liable; whether in his body,—his reputation,—his substance,—or whatever else is dear to him in a present world. — And,

1. When sickness, infirmities, and pains, invade the Christian, bringing sin and the curse to view, what supports him under these afflicting evils, is his knowledge of being one with Christ, who took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses, that, by virtue of his cross, these bitter fruits of the curse might be converted into so many healing medicines, and prove the means of destroying sin, the deadly root from whence they spring; that, if his sickness should be unto the death of the body, it shall be unto the health and life of the soul. In hope of this, the Christian, under pains and pining sickness, revives, (while nature complains), and is strong to suffer; using, at the same time, all proper means for preserving health, and lengthening life.

2. When the Christian suffers in his good name, which is, and ought to be dearer to him than life, and which, with his best care, he cannot always secure against the venomous tongue of malice and envy, then the joy of the Lord will be

be his support. — Of all evils, reproach to an ingenuous spirit, is the most wounding. — One cannot help feeling its galling sting. Conscience of innocence does not render him insensible to it : reproach, saith the holy Psalmist, hath broke my heart. For a time, it gives more exquisite pain to the innocent than to the guilty, from fear of losing his usefulness with his character : but after having been agitated, for some time, with such vexing thoughts, the testimony of a good conscience will at length relieve him of his disquietude. Should the reproach of conscience second that of the world, one's spirit then must fail him : but conscience acquitting him, he will rejoice in its testimony, calmly committing himself to him who judgeth righteously. When men say, “ Let us devise devices against him ; let us smite him with the tongue,” he appeals to God, in hope that he will plead his cause, and cover with shame those who seek his hurt. How is his hope raised, and his heart strengthened, upon hearing the encouraging voice of God in scripture : — “ Harken unto me, ye who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law ; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings ; — I, even I am he that comforteth you, who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass ?” The amiable example of Christ, and of his apostles, being set before him,

how chearfully does he engage in the imitation of it, in the exercise of patience, forbearance, and forgiveness, with prayer for reviling enemies? Nay, having now the same mind in him that was in Jesus, he is not only patient, but rejoices in his sufferings, as giving occasion for the display of those graces of which we have just spoken. Such a temper, maintained amidst the injurious reproaches of men, is indeed true greatness of spirit, and must ever be attended with peace and joy. Thus, David felt more joy, and shewed greater strength of mind, when, in meek reply to Shimei's railing, he said, "Let him alone, the Lord hath commanded him," than when, in the fury of resentment, he rushed forth against churlish Nabal.

3. When a Christian suffers by decay of circumstances, it is his peculiar happiness, that he can then support himself with joy in his God. Indeed, when one suffers through slothful neglect of his affairs, through profligacy and indiscreet profusion, or through the adventurous iniquitous methods too much in fashion, by which some, impatient of honest industry, hasten to be rich, he can have no joy in God to support his mind amidst the ruin flowing from such criminal causes. But when a Christian is reduced to hardships by the deceit or violence of men, by fraud or oppression, by casual disasters in the ordinary course of things, by the stormy elements of fire and water, he can joy in God as his God; he can bless God that his portion is not in this life,—that it is secured in
heaven:

heaven : he can take joyfully the spoiling of his goods, knowing in himself that he hath in heaven a better and an enduring substance. When the disquieting tumult raised in his mind by his loss, begins to settle, and he reflects upon the danger he was in, of being seduced from God, by the snare in his affluence, and that the diminution of his wealth hath called his more serious attention to the true riches ; instead of repining, he will see reason to rejoice at his loss, as his greatest gain, as the means of weaning him from the passing vanities of time, and of raising his heart to God, and the ever-during riches of the inheritance of the saints in glory. This seems to be meant by the Apostle, James i. 10. “ Let the rich man rejoice that he is brought low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away ;” because it teacheth him the fluctuating state of human affairs, the fading nature of sublunary enjoyments, and calls him to lay up treasure in heaven.

4. *The joy of the Lord is our strength* to bear us up against our loss, by the death of dear relations and friends on whom we have much dependence ; as when death deprives one of parents, while he yet needs the help of their counsel and care. In this orphan state the Christian finds resource in God as his God, and can say, “ God liveth, blessed be my rock ; when father and mother, and all other benefactors forsake me, God will take me up.”—When, by death, one is

deprived of children, from whose life he promised himself much comfort, he can say, in the submissive language of pious Job, — “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” But if in death they afford good hope of their dying in the Lord, amidst the tender softening of nature into tears of moderate sorrow, how is the godly parent’s heart comforted against fretting grief, meekly resigning to the will of God his own present pleasure, in hope of greater gain to the dead, in being perfectly blessed with God ! — How different is the chearful resignation of David, upon the death of the child of whose welfare in a future state he entertained good hope, from his violent grief and bitter lamentation for Absalom, whose wicked life gave reason to doubt of his after happiness !

Lastly, When the messenger of death comes to one’s own door, and calls, — “Set thy house in order ; thou shalt die, and not live ;” what can bear up one’s heart against the terrors of that awful scene, but the joy of the Lord, confidence in God as his God ? The natural courage which some wicked men exhibit in dying, is but foolhardiness and stupidity. The Christian alone, in the joyful remembrance of the word on which God caused him to hope, is strong and resolute to launch forth into the boundless ocean of eternity, to go through the dark valley of the shadow of death. David’s strength, when dying amidst
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the discouraging state of the church and his family, was his hope : — “ Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.” When one is about to leave this world for ever, to enter into the unknown world of spirits, to appear before a holy God, to receive his final sentence, that fixes his everlasting state, what can keep up his spirit, but the knowledge of his relation to Christ, as his all-sufficient Surety and Shepherd, that he is with him to guide him safe to those blissful regions whither he is entered as his forerunner ? Recollected experience of God’s former loving-kindness gives him some notion of the nature of the life of happy spirits, confirms his hope, and strengthens his heart into a composed waiting for God’s salvation, leading him to say with Jacob, — “ God Almighty appeared to me at such times, and in such places, and blessed me.” — In the mortifying prospect of lying down in the dust, to be consumed of worms, the joy and strength of his heart is, that he can say in hope of a glorious resurrection, “ I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

In this hope, with what godlike meekness, yea with what rapturous joy have many Christians died ! How have the martyrs overcome the world,
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rising superior to its frowns and smiles. Supported by more than human strength even by the felt presence of God! how have they triumphed over the most frightful instruments of torture! have sung amidst the raging flames, and glorified God in the fires! They that know the name of their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

CONCLUSION.

FROM what has been said, we see, that the persuasion of God's peculiar favour toward us, is so far from encouraging remissness in or weakening the motive to duty, that, on the contrary, it is our strength that carries us on chearfully, with resolution and spirit, in our Christian work and warfare. Acted by servile fear only, without some degree of joy and hope, our work will go on heavily, and we will soon throw off the galling yoke. If the love of God, if joy and delight in him do not rule in the heart, so as to be a counterbalance to the temptations of the world, to the fear of man, and the pleasures of sense, we cannot long preserve our integrity; whereas the persuasion and sense of God's favour, that he is for us, is ever with us to keep and deliver us, that he accepts our persons and services in Christ, that our labour shall not be in vain, that our work and warfare shall be successfully accomplished, and issue gloriously; this will put life in us, and carry us on with strength against all opposition. Let us then
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be careful to maintain a comfortable sense of God's love; without which, discouraging fears will ever be in our way, the grasshopper will be a burden: but love levels mountains, smooths rough places, and renders our path plain and easy. When therefore you find mistrust and discouragement creeping upon you, check it instantly with the Psalmist's exhortation, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God, for I shall yet praise him." Strive to rise from dejection of spirit to joy and strength. Strive to abound in love, so shall you ever abound in the work of the Lord. Be filled with joy and peace in believing, and you shall be filled with the works of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory of God.

In order to this, as you must be new creatures, created again in Christ Jesus unto good works; — as you are to give up yourselves to God, to love and to serve him, not for a time or for many days, but for ever, to follow him through every step of the wilderness to the heavenly world; so you must endeavour by grace to keep up a constant sense of your filial relation to God as your God and father in Christ, and of your acceptance in him as your righteousness and strength. "We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

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If we would maintain our rejoicing in the Lord, we must exercise ourselves in keeping consciences void of offence toward God and man. We must order our life with constant regard to the rules of the gospel. Peace be on them who walk according to this rule. Rejoicing in God, and working righteousness, have a mutual influence the one upon the other. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those who remember thee in thy ways." God meets them who are diligent and chearful in his work, with additional comfort. His comforts are only to be found by us when walking in his ways.

You must be particularly on your guard against sensual pleasures. These, whether they be secret or more open, have the same effect in robbing us of our joy and strength in the Lord: "Dearly beloved, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," These kill the spirit of prayer, a special mean of deriving comfort from God. Sensual indulgences so deaden the heart to this exercise, that it shall never have power to prevail with God for the blessing. One reason why Christians are such strangers to the comforts of God is, that they are strangers to mortification; that, inattentive to the rules of temperance and moderation in the use of lawful objects, prescribed by their Lord and Master, they too freely indulge to appetite, to bodily satisfactions, and the cares of this life. Much
sweet

sweet consolation might believers enjoy in their intercourse with God, were it not for their culpable conformity to the excesses and vanities of the world. In proportion to our indulgence to these, the Spirit of God withdraws his comforts; yea, our taste is vitiated so that we but faintly desire them. Spiritual comfort is incompatible with inordinate appetite and care for the things of sense. These take away the heart from God. If, notwithstanding habitual undue compliance with the irregular demands of appetite, one should occasionally warm in devotional exercises, and rise into a rapturous flash of joy, how delusive, how fatal is this joy! It is worse than perpetual dejection from the stings of a murmuring conscience. This may at length, like a gnawing moth, and rottenness in the bones, operate for the sinner's conversion from his joyless life of sin; whereas false joy confirms the soul in the chains of sin and death; the end whereof is shame and sorrow, anguish and everlasting woe.

Permit me to add, that for maintaining joy in the Lord, we are to avoid duplicity in all our words and actions, and ever act up to the plainness and simplicity of truth: "God's countenance beholds the upright, and his eyes are ever towards him for good."

Notwithstanding my address to young persons in another discourse, I shall not conclude this without offering my serious advice to them, if perhaps they will hearken to it.

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Be intreated, in God's name, and for your own sakes, to set out early in the ways of God, before you are seduced into the vitious course of the world, and your hearts become desperately corrupted with it.

Among the few who shall be saved, very few are recovered in advanced life, from a profligate debauched habit, to sobriety and serious godliness. If, after a long night spent in sin, you should at length awake to the business of religion, the objection against hope which you will find the hardest to conquer, is, That you have presumed and lingered too long against your light. Be warned, then, before you are immersed in the intoxicating pleasures of sin, to take up serious thoughts about your salvation, to apply to prayer, earnestly to plead with a gracious God to lead you, by faith, to Christ, that in him you may be justified, and preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom. Plead that, by his grace, you may enter so thoroughly into the spirit of religion, that you shall feel real joy in it, such as will preponderate against all the joys of the world. This will be your best security against the insinuating blandishments of sin.

After you have given up yourself to the Lord, and tasted that he is gracious, know and beware of the danger of being drawn off by the ensnaring illusions of sense. Your compliance with these, in violation of your engagement, will quench
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your joy, and so' grieve the Spirit, that you shall be left by him to go comfortless many days and years, perhaps all your life, and to go off the world trembling in a dark cloud of distracting doubts and fears. Probably this wrong turn for the vanities and follies of the world, (though never plunged in the gross pollutions of it), accompanied with the neglect or careless performance of duty, after a course of affectionate delightful walking with God, may be the reason why some serious souls are ever sad, ever complaining, but never rejoicing. Flee therefore youthful lusts : follow righteousness, faith, and love. Give your young hearts to Christ, and keep yourselves pure and unspotted from the world, and your joy will ever grow.

Early religion, uniformly continued in, will be the joy, the staff, and strength, of old age. You will then have solacing confirming reflections upon the kindness of youth, when, in obedience to God's call, you came after him in the wilderness. It will greatly comfort you to find, that in you are fulfilled these endearing words of grace : " Harken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are born by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb : and even to your old age, I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you : I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you." Rejoicing in spirit, you will then sing,

“ Thou art my hope, O Lord God, thou art my trust from my youth. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, thou wilt not forsake me. This God will be my God for ever and ever, my guide even unto death, my portion for ever. My lips shall greatly rejoice, when I sing unto thee, and my soul which thou hast redeemed.” *Amen.*

S E R -

S E R M O N VIII.

The Backslider's Confession and Supplication.

P s A L. cxix. 176.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep ; seek thy servant.

THE natural disposition of man, in his present state of apostasy, is to wander from God. Even in those who are regenerated, there is, from the influence of remaining corruption, an unhappy tendency to turn aside after the course of the world. But being “born spirit of the Spirit,” they neither depart wilfully, nor are they permitted to continue long unadmonished in their wanderings. God being merciful to them, orders matters so, that, either by some inward suggestion, or by some outward dispensation of providence, they are timeously brought to themselves, discover the error of their way, and return sorrowing : “ Their own backslidings are made to reprove them.”

Some there are, who, by tasting the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, appear to have made considerable advances in religion ;

ligion; but do not attain that heart-purifying faith whereby the soul is united to Christ. These, when they begin to decline, usually “slide back with a perpetual backsliding.” Pleased with their own way, though highly offensive to God and man, nay, making a mock of sin, and lightly sporting themselves with their own deceivings, they continue to go astray in the greatness of their folly, and wander without end. Or, if God hath thoughts of peace towards any of them, he will, for their recovery, pursue them with threatening, vexation, and rebuke. With fear upon fear, with trouble upon trouble, he will spend his arrows upon them, till they acknowledge their iniquity, and proclaim their bitter repentance to all around them.

A holy God (as it becomes his majesty) will intimate pardon and comfort to none, till he hath made them to know, that “it is an evil thing and bitter that they have departed from him.” If his own people forsake his law, and walk not in his judgements, he will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Though he give them their souls for a prey, yet he will be sanctified by taking vengeance upon their inventions. And when their sin is accompanied with peculiar aggravations, he frequently chastises the dearest of his children with uncommon severity, for a warning to others, that he may vindicate the
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the honour of his law, and manifest the glory of his holiness and justice in the eyes of the world.

Thus he dealt with David for his heinous offence in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. The same prophet who said to him, upon the confession of his guilt, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die," did likewise intimate to him that awful sentence, "The sword shall never depart from thine house." And it is not improbable, that David, when he uttered the confession and prayer in my text, was visited with some heavy affliction, which would naturally bring to his remembrance that aggravated transgression which God had distinguished by such an awful mark of his righteous displeasure; and raise in his mind a dark cloud of perplexing jealousies and fears, not to be dispelled by his own reasonings, nor by any other means, till God himself should again speak peace to his conscience, and lift up the light of his countenance upon him. Such we may suppose his situation to have been, when he thus addressed God, in words expressive of sorrowful contrition, and undissembled humility, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant.*

In discoursing further upon this passage, I propose to consider,

1. David's penitent confession: *I have gone astray like a lost sheep;*

2. His humble supplication: *Seek thy servant;*

3. The

3. The arguments with which he urges his suit, implied in the appellation of God's *servant*, which he avows himself to be.

And the whole may be improved, either for the prevention of backsliding, or for recovery from it.

I. I begin with the Psalmist's penitent confession :
I have gone astray like a lost sheep.

This is the language of one awakened from deep slumber, when he comes to have different views of himself, and of his way, from those he formerly had, while asleep in the arms of sin. It may be considered, both as an acknowledgement of his being out of the road of duty, — and as a complaint, with fear and trouble of mind, upon finding himself out of the way of safety.

“ I am at present where I ought not to be,” saith the awakened soul. “ I have strayed far from my God, and from the pastures of his flocks. I have left his fellowship, and the fellowship of his saints, to go in company with aliens, vain persons, and dissemblers; to feed with them upon sordid husks, in preference to the pure and substantial goodness of his house. Ah, wretched choice ! highly dishonouring to God, and hurtful to myself. The sober reflection upon it fills me at once with grief and shame.”

Here it may be proper to inquire, in what respects one may have reason to confess, that he
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hath gone *astray*; and to mention some of the different ways in which a saint is liable to wander from God.

The heart is the governing spring and principle of all our movements. If the heart be set and kept in a right direction, the man will abide with God. If the heart be neglected; if it is allowed to sink in sloth, and left to run wild for want of culture, the whole course of his life must run into disorder; or supposing that no irregularity should appear in the life, but, on the contrary, unblemished sobriety, and the shew of every virtue; yet, if the heart be not alive, and, with diligent care, held to its proper exercise, the man is gone away from God. Amidst all his virtuous appearances, he secretly serves, and is acted by some private selfish passion, appetite, or affection. His heart, deceived with this idol, hath so turned him aside, that, while he seems scrupulously mindful of the commands, he is quite forgetful of God, who is their author.

That thus in heart men may depart from God, while their lives are irreproachable, will appear, if we attend to the way in which we come to God, abide in him, and walk with him; that is, by faith and love, or faith which works by love. Here, by the way, we find the most rational and satisfying account of the foundation of virtue, which might supersede the painful disquisitions of speculative men in quest of it, and settle their

wrangling disputes about it, would their vanity allow them to take revelation for their guide.

Without faith that kindles love, no man can have fellowship with God, nor can enter upon his way, but must ever be a blind wanderer, as in a pathless desert. And after one has obtained faith, and is brought to God by it, if he be not careful habitually to exercise it, he must lose his way, and turn aside into by-paths. Faith keeps sight of God, and of the great realities of the invisible world; and by contemplating the love and glory of God, his awful and amiable glory in Christ, it kindles love, with solicitous concern to act for his honour, in all holy conversation, agreeably to the worthy design of the gospel. By these principles, in habitual exercise, under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, the soul is kept with God, rejoicing in his way.

But when a Christian wearies of the labour of thinking, “of girding up the loins of his mind;” when he relaxes his watch, intermits the exercise of faith, suffers it to shut its eye, and to sink into the soft slumbers of sloth, then the evil heart of unbelief, which is ever awake and active, is prompt “to depart from the living God.” I say not that it shall prevail to draw the faint into the extreme of an openly dissolute life. This is not the spot of God’s children; it betrays rather the apostasy of a false heart, once enlightened, but never renewed by the powerful light of the truth.

When

When security overtakes a sincere believer, so much of the witness of God still remains in him, as shall restrain him from grosser crimes, and keep him to duty. — But,

1. While he continues in the outward performance of duty, his heart is not so evangelical as formerly it was. He is not so humbly dependent upon Christ's mediation for acceptance and life, but is become over confident in himself. Instead of undertaking, as he ought, "to do all things through Christ strengthening him," he ventures much upon himself, even after his strength, through the decay of faith, is greatly impaired. And thus his faith, intermitting due attention to the Mediator, and declining in its exercise upon him for life, he (so far as it does so) strays from God, and acts criminally, by misplacing in himself the trust he ought to have in Christ. For it is a sort of idolatry, to attempt, in one's own strength, to do the work of God, the work for which his divine power alone is sufficient. — Again,

2. As, in self-confidence, he engages in duty, so he performs it very poorly, awkwardly, and uncomfortably. It must be so, when he loseth sight of the only source of life and strength, which, placed in the eye of faith, would warm, enliven, and enlarge his heart to run in the way of God's commandments. His communication with Christ's fullness being obstructed, by reason of the inac-

tion of faith, he becomes feeble and lame in every duty, heartless and spiritless, languid and formal, in all his religious services. In meditation, he is unfixed, desultory, and vain; in secret prayer, he is irreverent and cold, brief and unfrequent. His attendance upon ordinances is with weariness, without delight or comfort. Every religious exercise lies as a dead weight upon him.— And,

3. Having, in a great degree, lost relish for the duties of religion, feeling no profit nor comfort from them, the love of the world, and of its vanities, steals imperceptibly upon him. He engages to excess in its affairs and cares, in its company and conversation, in its entertainments and amusements. Business, which once was his burden, in so far as it diverted him from intercourse with his God, is now too much his pleasure. He conforms, unwarrantably, to the world, to its principles and maxims, to its customs and fashions. In regard to the friendship of the world, and to his secular interest connected with it, he falls in too much with the political views and schemes of others, varying from what once was his settled judgement, and is, for a time at least unhappily bribed into a change of sentiment; a new light, which is only darkness succeeding to light.

Thus far a Christian who has in him a root of grace, may decline and fall from his first love, and
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first works ; and, if left to himself, it is hard to say where he would stop. But shall he be permitted ever thus to wander, to dream out his life, and to die in his sin ? No ; — he shall not perish ; — he is one of the lost sheep of Israel ; — he must be sought out, and brought back again to the fold.

All along, in his slumbering declining state, he is dissatisfied with himself, is restless in his sleep, — uneasy on his couch, — scared as it were with dreams, and terrified with visions. As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is the heaven-born man that wandereth from his place ; ever in pain to get back again to his rest in God. His murmuring conscience is a moth and rottenness, or a gnawing worm within him : And God will order it so, that, by his rebukes, by some sharp affliction, he shall be thoroughly awakened, and brought to himself. — He awakes from his dream, and shudders to see the slovenly state of mind he was in, — his neglect of duty, — the negligence of his spirit in duty, — the stupor, the vanity, the formality, and hypocrisy of his spirit in praying, in hearing, in communicating ; he sees, that when he thought he was with God, doing him service, he was straying from him, mocking him with his “ blind, corrupt offerings ; ” — that, in being “ the friend of the world, he was the enemy of God. ” — Upon this discovery he is confounded, and, in distress of soul, adopts the language of the

the Psalmist, — “ I have gone astray like a lost sheep.”

There is something in the form of this confession, and the terms in which it is expressed, that well deserves our attention, and may convey to our minds very useful instruction.

I. The penitent is represented as laying the whole blame of his misconduct upon himself : *I*, says he, *have gone astray* : “ I was not constrained by force or violence, but prompted and led off by the sly corruption of my own heart ; I have freely and willingly gone astray. — I plead no excuse from the temptations of the world. When sinners enticed, I easily consented. — I plead no excuse from my particular circumstances. — Let no man dare to say he is tempted of God, that, by placing him in such a situation, he lays a snare for him : — God forbid ! — Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. — I plead no excuse, nor alleviation of my guilt, from the inbred corruption of my nature : this, with the Psalmist, I regret as my reproach and shame. — I was conceived in sin ; upon that account I am especially vile.” Thus the penitent stands guilty, without defence, before God. He offers no apology from invincible inability, but confesses, that, if he had maintained the watch and care which were in his power, he might, by the grace of God, have prevented the deviations in heart and life which now afflict him.

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It is the immutable faithfulness of God's promise that secures the believer's perseverance in grace. This, however, supercedes not the necessity of duty on his part, but rather requires his constant attention to it, and his diligent exercising of the grace he hath received, in order to its continued preservation and growth. While God "worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure," we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. These two are so evidently connected together, viz. the operations of God's grace, and the Christian's diligence in duty, and he is so clearly taught this connection by the word, and by the grace of God in him, that there must be a great degree of frowardness in his neglect of duty; and if he allows himself to misunderstand and forget it, he shall be taught to understand and mind it by the severe discipline of the rod.

Again, in comparing himself to a *lost sheep*, the penitent confesseth his brutish headlong folly, with self-contempt and abhorrence, especially for having withdrawn from under the eye and care of his good shepherd. In having done so, he now sees that he acted a foolish irrational part; and says, with Asaph, "So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee." Instead of exercising the understanding and reflection of a man, I drove on with the blind precipitance of an irrational unthinking animal. In sinning, it is certain, men suspend the exercise of sober thinking;

ing; they do not commune seriously with their own hearts, and with the word of God. Sinners, therefore, as such, being inconsiderate, are compared to the dullest animals: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Sprightly turns of wit fall from them amidst their wanton excesses, but it is manifest, that they think not, as the sober reason of man directs; which inexcusable neglect of thought, the prophet reproves in his expostulation with transgressors: "Remember this, and shew yourselves *men*, bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors." The penitent, in this view of his misconduct, as the effect of brutish inconsiderateness, despises himself.

By open sinning, men render themselves base and contemptible to the virtuous, worthy part of mankind; and very grating to their pride is the just contempt they meet with. But when they awake to cool reflection, none then despises them so much as they do themselves. In security, and in dissipation of thought, they fancy many things to be harmless which are highly criminal; that to transgress the strict boundaries of religion and virtue, indicates largeness of mind, rising above the illiberal confined views of others. They glory in what is no glory, but is shameful folly. But when they are brought to think as men and Christians, they are ashamed of their meanness,—yea they abhor themselves

selves for their wrong judgement and conduct; they are ashamed even of their religious performances, upon which they once valued themselves. In discovering the selfishness, vanity, and indifference of their spirits in them, they lothe themselves, and confess, — “ We are all as an unclean thing, our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” So far are they now from expecting favour and reward for their duties, that, on their account, they dread anger and rebuke.

This leads me to repeat the observation I made when I entered upon this head of discourse; namely, that as the words express a confession of having strayed from the path of duty, so they may likewise be considered as a complaint of the true penitent with fear and trouble of mind, upon finding himself out of the way of safety.

When one dwells carelessly at his ease, he sins without fear, — not considering what he is doing. Roused by some affliction, or by the threatenings of the word, he finds, to his astonishment, that his folly has brought him into circumstances of extreme trouble and danger, out of which he cannot extricate himself. All refuge failing him, he is in consternation, almost distracted with fear. As a lamb fallen asleep in the desert, when it awakes after the shepherd and flocks are gone, — it looks round and round, but gains no sight of them; — fearful of danger, it stands aghast in per-

plexing uncertainty whither to direct its course, then wildly rushes upon a track that chances to lead farther off from safety into greater danger: so is he who sins securely, and says in his heart, I shall see no evil. He awakes, — he finds himself upon unsafe ground, — that sin has deceived him, and, by its flatteries, drawn him off from his fortrefs and defence, into the toils of his enemies, far from his protector and friend. — Conscience now falls upon him, with its cutting upbraidings. — The law works wrath, and raises a storm of dark fears in his soul. — The enemy that formerly deceived him into a persuasion of the harmlessness of sin, now throws his sins in his teeth, frightens him with suggestions of divine wrath, to overwhelm him in the horrors of despair. He tempts him to conclude that God hath finally forsaken him, and “will be favourable no more.” These distressing suggestions he finds it not so easy to repel as once he imagined. And now, under doubt of God’s favour, he sees no safety for him any where, but frowns and threatened ruin from every quarter.

When, by unbending thought, one lets his conscience sleep in security, he insensibly runs into “a world of iniquity;” all the time speaking peace to himself, while he is laying up terrors and sorrows for an after period. When the man comes out of his dream, and conscience, with vigour, resumes its function, he finds himself in a
perilous.

perilous situation, involved in difficulties and dangers, very different from the flattering hopes with which Satan and his own heart had seduced and betrayed him into sin. He now feels the end and fruit of sin to be very bitter and dangerous, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after other gods;" and he is ready to tear himself in vexation, for having suffered his heart to be so easily deceived by the palpable forgeries of sin. — But this will appear more fully, while I consider,

II. The course which the Psalmist takes for his recovery, i. e. supplication to God, expressed thus, *Seek thy servant.*

Altho' a sinner, on his first return to God, may properly adopt this form of prayer; yet here I consider it rather as the language of one formerly acquainted with the comforts of God's fellowship and love, but whose heedless deviations from his way have now brought him into perplexing distress. The prayer expresses,

I. The vehemence of the most earnest impatient desire of soul to be restored to his former happy state. Being now thoroughly awakened from the "sleep of sin," he cannot say in the language of cold indifference, "If God recover me, it is well; if he does not, there is no help for it, I must perish." One who "knows the terrors of the Lord," cannot so easily sustain the thoughts of perishing; — no, — he can have no enjoyment

of himself, until he is on his former good terms with God. And for this end, he, among other means, employs earnest prayer, as in ψ 169. "Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord,—let my supplication come before thee." O to get back again to my former happy state, in friendly familiar converse with God! "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the Almighty was yet with me." Finding himself in a strange land, a captive in the hands of his enemies, who are ready to destroy him, he is extremely solicitous to escape out of this perilous situation, to return to his Father's house, to his king and country, to his brethren and friends;—to regain his former peaceful residence within the walls of Jerusalem, under the countenance and patronage of his God and King.——It expresses,

2. Felt ignorance and inability to find the way that leads back to God. Deceived by Satan and their own hearts, men presume, that, though for a time they step out of God's way, they have it in their power to repent, and recover themselves, when they please. Probably Judas sold his Lord for the paltry bribe of thirty pieces of silver, upon presumption that afterwards he would, from his gentleness and grace, easily obtain forgiveness. It is dangerous to presume upon sovereign grace.

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The foolish sinner, in his prosperous state, adverts not to the danger. But, when trouble and distress check him in his rambling, and compose him to reflection, he then perceives the fatal deception. He feels to his sorrow, that, having lost his way, he is bewildered in a maze, out of which he cannot extricate himself. His sight and strength are gone, and the enemy is upon him. So it befel him who resigned his strength to his idol, when, upon alarm of the enemy, he attempted to shake himself as at other times, behold his strength is gone, and he is become weak as other men. Wilful sinning provokes the Spirit to depart, upon which the deserted Christian loses sight of the way of peace, of which natural light affords no notice; and though it be clearly laid before us and proclaimed in the word, yet if the Spirit withhold his light, one cannot discern or apply it to his comfort. The glorious name of God lay fair before David, besides several promises of peculiar favour to him; yet, under desertion, he could not apply them, for his relief from trouble. What he formerly conceived for his great comfort, he now misapprehends. Various objections and discouraging thoughts cast up in his mind, especially if he has now before his eye that great sin for which the law appointed no sacrifice: How, would he say, can it consist with the holiness, justice, and veracity of God, and with the wise measures of his government, to pardon a sinner who

who hath so sinned presumptuously? The express threatenings of scripture, seeming to concur with this reasoning, heighten his discouragement, and bear down his faith. In attempting, by himself, to rise, he but sinks deeper in the mire. Like Afaph, Ps. lxxiii. 16. "When he thinks to know this, it is too painful for him." His repeated efforts to support himself against the condemnation of the law, and the challenges of conscience, are all baffled. Thus he is left "to take counsel in his soul, having sorrow of heart," for many days, as a just chastisement for his wanton presumption.

If then a saint, after wandering from his God, has it not in his will to renew the exercise of faith and repentance for his consolation, what presumptuous folly is it, in a graceless sinner to imagine it is in his power to recover himself when he pleases, or that at any time, in sickness and on a death-bed, he can, in faith, ask mercy so as to obtain it? — I add,

3. That the penitent, after finding all means, his reasonings, and best endeavours, ineffectual for his recovery, is directed by faith to betake himself to God, under full conviction, that he alone, by his light and arm, can seek, and find, and bring him back.

Means are to be used, but not to be rested in. After a saint has wandered out of the way, no means, no instruments, neither scripture nor providence,

vidence, nor ministers nor ordinances, nor angels nor saints, can of themselves recover him. God alone, by his grace and power, can fetch him back. In converting and in restoring his people, he makes use of means and instruments. He employs the word, and messengers clothed with his authority, to declare it. For recovering David, God sends Nathan to him with a parable in his mouth. He revives and comforts Saul, by sending Ananias to him. And Cornelius is warned to call for Peter, who should tell him words which would enlighten and strengthen his faith. But it was God himself, with these instruments, that made them effectual for the purposes he designed to serve by them. God, with Nathan and his parable, so prospered the prophet's art in spreading his net about David, that he was taken, sought out, and found. He caused his heart to perceive the reproof as a message from him; to it, as such, David meekly submits, and reverences the prophet. Thus, by means, God ever seeks and finds his chosen, causing them, in reading, in hearing, in thinking, and praying, to perceive his voice of authority and grace, for their wounding and healing. — Again,

4. The prayer expresses a humble acknowledgement of his need of grace, and thankful willingness to stand indebted to it for his recovery. When he prays, "Lord, seek me," it is as if he had said, "Having wandered from thee, O Lord,
and

and lost my way, with all power to recover myself, thou must seek me, else I am for ever lost; and having, by my inexcuseable revolt, forfeited all right to thy favour, and incurred thy just displeasure, if ever thou dost recover me, it must be of grace, exceeding rich grace." He acknowledges, that it was of grace he at first distinguished him by his favour; that he took him from the sheep-cote to be ruler over his people; that all his favours to him were purely of grace, even when no open offence reproached his life: "Of thine own heart," says he, "thou, Lord, hast done all these great things. Much more must it be of grace, if, after I have offended thee, and the generation of thy children, by my shameful abuse of the signal gifts of thy grace, thou shalt restore me again, and continue me in thy favour." God's sure covenant is established with the believer, and infallibly secures his perseverance in grace, and his final salvation; but, by this solemn engagement to continue his favour, God's grace is not lessened, nor the believer's relapses into sin extenuated; but both are thereby rather heightened, grace in its glory, and sin in its demerit. Such is the believer's sense, under conviction, after falling into any instance of offensive misconduct, that by the peculiar favours of heaven to him, his sin is become exceeding sinful, is more heinous in its nature, and more deserving of death, than the sins of others; not without fear,
that

that it may bring wrath and death upon him. That this was David's fear, appears from Nathan's consoling message to him : " God hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die." If God had not spoken this to his heart, he could not have conceived hope, but must have died in despair. And after hope begins to dawn, how earnestly does he cry to God for the increase of it ! " Rejoice the heart of thy servant." It is grace the sinner pleads in his first return to God. It is grace, exceedingly rich grace, the believer ever after views, and pleads, for the pardon and healing of his backslidings. And, under conviction and trouble for sin, how marvellous in his eye appears every renewed manifestation of pardoning mercy ! he thinks it not the less grace, that God is engaged by promise to continue his mercy towards him. This rather raises his admiration of the incomprehensible grace of his eternal purpose, and of the matchless glory of his faithfulness, in keeping promise to one " who he knew was to be a transgressor from the womb, and would deal very treacherously."

5. This prayer indicates some good degree of trust in the gracious nature of God. Without such trust, no means would be used. In absolute despair, the hands would hang down, quite enfeebled for action ; but when one, with serious concern, applies to prayer and other means, faith then operates in his heart, though he does not advert to it. And its nature is, to think honour-

ably of God's grace and goodness, with humble hope of good from it. By causing such thoughts to arise, it affords some support to the soul, amidst the most perplexing doubts and fears. When it sees no light from any particular promise to direct and encourage it; when the man thinks, that the temper of his mind, and the actings of his life, have little appearance of a state of grace, and, in consulting his own reason, cannot conceive how a holy God can, consistently with his honour, pardon and favour such a sinner as he is; even then faith conceives some hope from the general declarations of God's merciful and gracious nature. It is published in scripture, it is verified in experience, that the God of Israel is a merciful God. This encourages prayer: "Seek me, O Lord; I have wantonly wandered from thee; — I have lost my way, and cannot find it. — By my foolishness, I have forfeited all right to thy favour and help. — I know not, but thou knowest, how I may yet be restored. — The riches of thy grace exceed finite comprehension. — Thy wisdom is an unfathomable depth. — There may be hid with thee some method of restoring me, not only with the safety of thy honour, but with a rich revenue of glory to thy wisdom and grace. — Thou art wonderful in counsel! and shall not the wondrous glory of this hidden wisdom, of the exceeding riches of thy grace, appear in thy kindness towards me, through Christ Jesus?"

Faith

Faith is very ingenious in suggesting expedients against discouragements; as we see it did in support of the woman of Canaan.

It is the Lord himself that suggests such thoughts, and “girds us with strength,” when we know it not. All the time the penitent is instant with God in prayer, the good Shepherd, by his Spirit, is present with his heart. His loving eye is upon his poor bewildered creature, watching the proper season (which is ordinarily when he sees that his power is gone) to give him deliverance and relief. — But I proceed to unfold,

III. THE arguments with which the penitent urges his suit, implied in the appellation of *servant*, whereby he at once encourages his hope, and acknowledges the obligation upon him to return to God, and to walk with him.

The argument implied in the appellation of God’s *servant*, by which he designs himself, as it is pertinent to be pled by a penitent, so is it proper in the mouth of a sinner, upon his first return to God. — And,

1. As an argument proper to be used by the latter, it may be unfolded thus: “O Lord, I am bound to be thy servant. Thou art my creator; and thou hast created me for thy service and glory. I have wickedly departed from thee, my rightful Lord, and sold myself to strangers, to thine enemies. Thy right to me, notwithstanding,

ing, still stands good. I ought to be thy servant, and am willing to return to thy service. Assert thy right to me, and restore me to my bounden duty. Shall I be thus left in the hands of enemies,—a lost creature,—lost to thee,—lost to myself,—lost to all the valuable purposes of my creation? Is it not more pleasing to thy benign nature, that I should regain man's first happy state in thy service? Seek me, therefore, recover, and receive me. And why shouldst thou not? There is now no obstruction from justice to my recovery. Thou hast found a ransom. Thou hast sent thy divine Son, as thy servant, to act and to suffer for sinful men. He magnified the law, and satisfied justice. Wilt thou not, therefore, take me into favour, make me thy servant, permit me to live, since thy merciful nature can have no pleasure in my death, and as there is no necessity from justice that I should die?"

Still farther, as a member of the church, he may plead thus: "By baptism, I have been early dedicated to thee, to be thy servant for ever. I have been so dedicated by those who had authority from thee to do it. This gave thee a peculiar right to me, as to a holy thing consecrated to thy service. By withdrawing myself from thee, after such solemn consecration of my service, I have incurred the guilt of sacrilege. Recover thy property; seek and find thy servant, early devoted to thy fear." — But,

2. A faint who hath joined himself to the Lord in terms of the new covenant, in pleading with God for his recovery from backsliding by a renewed exertion of his grace, may reason thus.

“ Lord, I am thy servant by right of covenant entered into between us both. Thou hast called me to be thy servant. Thou hast shewed me thy covenant, and gained my hearty consent to it. Thou saidst, I will be thy God : I agreed to take thee for my God, and joined myself to thee in an everlasting covenant, to love and to serve thee. In taking me to be thy servant, thou didst engage to be my God, — to furnish me for thy work, — to protect and defend me. By my own folly, I am fallen into the hands of other masters ; but they have no right to detain me. I am thy property. I am pre-engaged to thee. Thou hast paid my ransom. “ Truly I am thy servant.” Although other lords have decoyed me away from thee ; and though I have given them encouragement, they have only usurped thy right. Still I am thy sworn subject ; thou art my lawful prince. Demand me back again ; rescue me with power : why should thine enemy be allowed to triumph ? I may not be sold for a slave, being thy lawful captive and hired servant ; even as a Hebrew servant might not be sold for a bondman, because the Lord claimed a peculiar right to him as his servant : “ For unto me, saith the Lord, the children
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dren of Israel are servants, they are my servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt ; I am the Lord their God."

Or he may reason thus : " It is true, I have turned aside from thy way ; but still I am willing to be thy servant ; my heart is with thee. Other lords I renounce ; their rule is to me the most oppressive servitude ; thy service is my choice, my liberty, my honour, my comfort. I desire nothing so passionately as grace to fit me for serving thee with advantage, a heart enlarged to run the way of thy commandments. Is not one who honestly desires to be thy servant, encouraged to hope for thy favour ? Shall not thy love and pity draw thee to meet, half-way, a returning prodigal, who desires to be as one of thy hired servants ? Hast thou not said, " O Israel, thou art my servant ; I have formed thee ; thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy sins. Return unto me ; for I have redeemed thee." — I desire to return ; and if I know myself, am disposed to do thy will. I am now in a dark comfortless state of mind ; yet (as the Psalmist adds in the close of the verse) *do I not forget thy commandments*. I walk in darkness, yet fear the name of the Lord, and obey the voice of his servants. Is there not hope of favour to one of this mind ?"

Consciousness of a sincere inclination to the service of God, under conviction of past sins, and of many present defects and disorders, gives encouragement

couragement to hope in God. If our heart condemn us not of secret regard to any sin, but is conscious of willingness to forego every sin, the most favourite sin, dear as a right eye or a right hand, then may we have confidence towards God, as his heaven-born children.

It is this consciousness of sincerity the Psalmist avows, in pleading his character as God's servant. He pleads not his regal dignity as King of Israel; nor merely his soundness in the faith, nor the countenance and encouragement he gave to others in the service of God, but his character as God's servant, "being willing in all things to obey him." With such consciousness, one may, with humble trust, commit himself to the grace of God, and expect from it all the strength and comfort that is necessary for his service. — Again,

He may urge his suit thus: "Lord, I am thy servant, by public solemn profession and engagement."

David was raised to serve God in an eminent station. He did not think, that by his high rank he was privileged to take greater liberties in sin than others. So far from it, that, as his eminence had set him up to public view, and rendered his actions more conspicuous, he judged, that on that account it was the more necessary for him to excel in grace, to be more accurately attentive to all the rules of the law, that, by a life of distinguish-
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ed exemplary holiness, he might exhibit a bright pattern for imitation to all Israel. “ I am (might he say) thy professed servant ; I have much to do for thy honour : O favour me with grace, that I may serve thee with the circumspection, the meekness of wisdom, the diligence, the liberty and comfort, which become thy servant.”

In order to the faithful discharge of the service we owe to God, we must have grace to live unblameably, and also to live comfortably and joyfully. The argument, therefore, arising from the appellation of God's *servant*, is powerful with God, and may be urged as follows.

“ That I may serve thee in my station with success, and with credit to religion, O forgive and correct the errors of my past life, and prevent after wanderings. Let my errors be made manifest to myself, that I may amend them, before they become manifest to the world. Why should the hearts of thy children be made sad, and the wicked be hardened, by my misconduct ? O let not the enemy reproach religion, nor the foolish people blaspheme thy name for my sake. Save me from being the cause of such dishonour to thee, and of such mischief to men.”

And indeed greater prejudice hath been done to the interests of Christianity by the dissolute worldly lives of its professed friends, than by all the volumes of infidelity which have ever been published by its avowed enemies. The truth of
Christ

Christ hath received its deepest wound in the house of his friends.

Farther may the dejected saint plead, "That I may serve thee, my God, to advantage, give me to live joyfully, walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. If I am left to go disconsolate and dejected, it is but little service I can do thee. Many duties will be omitted, many opportunities of doing good will be overlooked, to the loss of honour to thee, and of profit to men. But let the joy of thy salvation be my strength; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee; saints also shall be consoled and edified.

If thou shalt deny me comfort, any little service I do will be unpleasant to thee, as it will be irksome to me; for thou lovest a chearful giver. Besides, being discouraged and sad in heart myself, instead of being a helper of the faith and joy of others, I shall discourage and weaken them; yea, by my rueful ungainly air, I shall give an unfavourable representation of thy way, to the world, as a joyless business that starves its votaries: — enliven, therefore, and rejoice the heart of thy servant, that I may serve thee with alacrity. This will recommend religion to enemies, and draw them to embrace it; when they see, that, while I am temperate in all earthly things, I am still joyful, serene, and happy in thee, and abundantly rewarded by thy service. — Many shall see this, and trust in

the name of the Lord. — Bring my soul, therefore, out of prison, that I may praise thy name. The righteous shall compass me about, when thou shalt deal bountifully with me." This joyful temper, and a regular life, are so connected together, that none can joy in God, who walks not circumspectly.

Allow me here to add, to what hath been said, a few things by which one may know, whether the Lord, from special good-will, be in search of him.

1. First, then, are you awake to feel yourself lost, — lost, not so much for the loss of the world, and of the comforts of natural life, as in the loss of God's favour and love.

Once you dwelt carelessly, without thought or fear of this: do you now feel, that, to be "without God," is to be lost indeed, lost amidst the greatest worldly affluence? — Is affliction upon you? This of itself is grievous to nature; but what is it that embitters it with deadly venom? Is it the remembrance of sin, by which you have forfeited the favour of God? Were this sting taken out of your trouble, could you comfort yourself against all sorrows? Were you sure of recovering God's favour, would you, in the loss of all other things, joy in God's salvation? If it is thus with you, it looks as if God, by your affliction, was about to bring you home to the Good Shepherd. You have the appearance of those with re-
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gard to whom Jesus says, — “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” These words may speak comfort unto you.

2. Do you seek the Lord, sincerely lamenting after him in all duties and ordinances? When God is in search of a lost sinner, he secretly moves his heart to seek him. — He seeks thee, and thou callest upon him to seek and to find thee; surely thou shalt be found. When the appointed time of deliverance to God’s people draws near, the time of disclosing his thoughts of peace towards them, it is said to them, — “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me; and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye search for me with all your heart.” You seek him with all your heart, when you seek him as with diligence, so likewise with a heart willing to part with every sin, even with the sin for which you once had the strongest passion.

You may, at times, think you are thus willing, but beware of deceit. — You are not sincerely willing to forego sin, if you are not led to this willingness by a painful bitter sense of the horrible evil and deformity of sin. If, in seeking the Lord, you are not only willing to resign every sin, but are filled with indignation against it, as the accursed thing which hath separated between you and your God, and would acknowledge your

high obligation to his goodness, if, though you should not be admitted to see his face in heaven, he would deliver you from the dominion of every lust, especially of your predominant passion, then have you already that of God in you, which will lead to everlasting consolation. Grace hath wrought a change in you though you know it not. But he who prays with secret regard to some idol in his heart, seems not to have yet begun to pray in the Spirit, nor to be sought after by any effectual operation of grace. He seeks, but seeks amiss; he therefore shall not find: and wo to him if he die under the power of his indulged passion; it shall fasten, as a viper, upon his inmost soul, and be his cruel tormentor in hell for ever. — Once more,

3. Does the word which we preach find you out? Does it describe your particular character, and the course of your life, which must be hid from the minister? Does it make manifest the secrets of your heart? Do you hear the thoughts and designs which lodged in your mind before you came to the house of God, read over to you, and your particular sin reproved, as if the minister addressed you by name, saying, "Thou art the man?" Instead of being irritated with jealousy of an uncourteous design in the speaker to point you out to the public, do you humbly take the reproof as from the Omniscient God? If so,

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it appears that the Spirit of God is, by this word, seeking you, as he sought David by Nathan's parable. Had not God's effectual blessing accompanied the prophet's ministry, David would have served him as some of his successors served other faithful prophets. The king's wrath would have kindled, and he would instantly have ordered Nathan to prison or to death for his presumption. But it having been God's kind design to recover his servant from his fall, he is humbled, — takes the reproof as from God, — repents, and reforms. Art thou, in like manner, humbled by the word that reproves thy sin; yea, art thou glad of the reproof, that it is come so near to pierce the heart, saying, — O may I hope, that this word, which comes with authority that overawes my soul, is the word which is designed to recover me to God? Be of good cheer, behold! thy salvation cometh, it is not far off! And all ye to whom these few things apply, it is highly probable, that, ere long, after you have got out of your discouragements, men shall call you “a holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, — a people sought out, and not forsaken.”

Now to conclude :

The design of all that hath been said, is to shew the necessity of walking with God, habitually in his fear, with accurate attention to the rules of religion,

gion, for enjoying the comforts of it, — for adorning our profession and recommending it to the world. To be sober, and to watch unto prayer, — to be harmless and blameless, giving no offence, is the indispensable law of Christianity, equally binding upon all who name the name of Christ. And is not God kind in commanding such a life? Is it not man's liberty and happiness to have power over every appetite, every affection and passion? Is it not real misery to have any lust for one's master? Should we suppose one to fall short of heaven, and to perish, would we not deem his deliverance from this tyrant to be some alleviation of his torture; as he would, at least, be relieved of one vexing devil in hell? Is not all this undoubted truth? Does it not recommend itself as truth to conscience? — We know it doth. We know, it shall, one day, be confirmed in the experience of every soul that hears it, — in the sad experience, perhaps, of some of us, a few days hence, upon a deathbed. — Conscience, if fairly listened to, witnesseth alike in us all, to the great lines of truth. For, “as face answereth to face, in a glass, so doth the heart of man to man.”

But, after all that can be said, some will continue to be what they were. “As one beholding his natural face in a glass, goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was ;”

was ;” so too many hear, are convinced it may be to compunction ; but neglecting to dwell upon the subject in their after thoughts, the conviction loses its effect. Plunging hastily into the cares and pleasures of life, they choke the good seed, that it becomes unfruitful.

Of such a man, God says, “ Let him alone, he is joined to his idols. — The sorrows of a travelling woman shall come upon him. — I will meet him as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps. — I will rend the caul of his heart.”

Some, from a strange sort of unmanly vanity, and low ambition to gain applause from the fools of the world, the slaves of sin, easily suffer themselves to be led away with the error of the wicked. Young persons, especially, are liable to this weakness. They cannot withstand the solicitations and taunts of the multitude of their equals, but, abandoning reason to the usurpation of domineering passions, they glory in running to the extreme of licentiousness, in breaking through all the restraints of religion, “ rejoicing when they do evil.” Some, not so lost to all sense of goodness, but who yet preserve some remains of modesty, and of deference to reason and conscience, from a weak fear of being accounted unfashionably sober and grave, simply go along with the multitude, against the conviction and condemnation of their own minds. Could we persuade such to consult

sult yet more deliberately with themselves, there is hope, that their own reflections might, by the blessing of God, prevail to gain their compliance with the obligations of religion, the most perfect reason and truest glory in the world. To you then I say, and what I say to you I say unto all, “Quit yourselves like men;” be strong in the Lord, and stand firm against temptation. Quit you like the noble followers of the Lamb. I call them *noble*, as I well may. They are so, indeed, who resist sin, and the various incentives to it; choosing rather to expose themselves to the hatred and reproach of the world, than, by any compliance with its vicious course, to dishonour their Lord. They are truly noble, who, “having respect unto the recompence of reward, esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world;” who, “knowing in themselves, that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance, patiently wait, through the Spirit, for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

If the world depart from the purity of the gospel, either in principle or practice, it cannot justify your conformity to it in any instance, that by the multitude it is deemed to be harmless, because it is the fashion. This rather will be an argument with the sincere lover of Jesus to be more strictly attentive to the perfect rule of God’s word, and more studious to shine in those virtues and graces
which

which are most directly opposite to the errors and vices that prevail in the world. Greatly beloved is he who thus distinguisheth himself for God! Men may treat him ignominiously, and charge him with superstitious singularity; but how abundantly shall this reproach be recompensed by the honourable testimony of God in his favour! such testimony as he gave to Caleb: “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.” Would not such a report from God, whispered in your conscience, yield you pleasure far surpassing that which arises from the united applauses of angels and men? When, again, it shall be said unto thee, as unto Noah, “Come thou, and all thy house, into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me, in this generation;” Come thou, thy children, and all thy house, into the ark; there dwell safely, and “rest quiet from fear of evil,” when the cry shall be heard, “Destruction upon destruction;” when fear is on every side, and all the faces of the wicked are turned into paleness, and every one of them is seen with his hands upon his loins, bewailing himself with most bitter lamentation, “Wo is me now; for my soul is wearied because of murderers:” in that day of distress unto others, you shall rejoice in God, and sing for joy of heart. To those who keep themselves pure

and unspotted from the world in a time of general apostasy, may well be applied the Redeemer's comfortable words to the church of Sardis :
 " Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments ; and they shall walk with me in white ; for they are worthy." —
Amen.

S E R M O N IX.

Reasons for enquiring where God is to be found, and directions where to find him.

J O B, xxiii. 3.

O that I knew where I might find him!

HOW different is the language of a renewed heart, under the load of extreme and complicated distress, from that which is dictated to a carnal mind by the sorrow of the world, which worketh death! Job, laid on a dunghill, and covered with sore and loathsome boils, bereaved of his children, his servants, and his flocks, doth not say, “O that I knew where, or by what means, I might recover those earthly comforts I have lost!” but, “O that I knew where I might find him whom my soul loveth, the God of all my mercies, in whose favour is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life!” — “O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; when the secret of the Lord was upon my tabernacle; when

the Almighty was yet with me!" Amidst all his outward troubles, the hiding of God's face moved his bitterest complaint: "Let my God return to me, and I ask no more. Let him restore unto me the joy of his salvation, and all shall be well."

From the case of this holy man, we learn,

1. That when God visits his children with outward trials of the severest kind, it may please him, at the same time, for wise and holy purposes, to withdraw from their souls the comforts of his love. This observation I propose to illustrate, in the first place;

2. I shall point out some of the weighty reasons every rational soul has for the solicitous exclamation in my text: *O that I knew where I might find him!* — After which, I shall endeavour,

3. In answer to the serious and anxious inquirer after God, to inform him, with certainty, where he is to be found.

I. I observe, That when God visits his children with severe outward distress, it may please him, at the same time, for wise and holy purposes, to withdraw from their souls the comforts of his love; which they justly account the bitterest ingredient in their affliction.

It is no unusual thing to hear the people of God, in the hottest furnace of adversity, complaining,
that

that the Comforter, who should relieve their souls, is gone away from them. Thus did Job, the most perfect saint in his day : “ The arrows of the Almighty (said he) are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits. The terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.” Here we see, that his outward distresses were not the matter of his complaint, but the withdrawing that consciousness of the divine favour which he formerly enjoyed. “ I cry (says he) unto thee, O God, and thou dost not hear me ; I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou writest bitter things against me.” How often do we hear David uttering the like complaints, when wasted with sickness, or persecuted by his foes ? “ O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger ; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Return, O Lord, and deliver my soul.” Others we find bewailing, in the day of their calamity, that the Lord had hid his face from them, and seemed to cast off their soul ; — that he covered himself with a cloud, that their prayers should not pass through ; — that he had brought them into darkness, and not into light ; — all of them expressing a similarity in the inward state of their minds to the melancholy aspect of their outward condition.

Thus it has been with the most eminent saints in former times ; and this still continues to be the lot of God’s children. It is indeed a part of their conformity to Christ, who, in the extremity of his
bodily

bodily torments, had the comfortable sense of his Father's love withdrawn, in testimony of his just severity against those sins of his people, which he then bore in his own body upon the cross, when he was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities.

God hath a twofold design in dealing after this manner with the dearest of his children. — One is, to reclaim them when they go astray, to awaken them from security, and rouse them to their duty. — The other is, to bring their faith and patience, and other graces, into exercise, for his own glory, and their spiritual improvement.

The *first* design of affliction is, to reclaim the children of God when they go astray, to render them attentive to their highest interests, and more busy in their preparation for an eternal world. It is true, that he usually begins with moderate correction. He applies the rod at first with a gentle hand; and while he strews their path with thorns, to prevent their lying down in it, or mistaking it for their rest, he at the same time encourages them to go forward in their journey, by speaking good and comfortable words to their hearts. He mitigates their necessary correction with some tokens of his love; and sometimes imparts to them such measures of inward joy, as do more than overbalance all their sufferings from without, and make them thankful, and even joyful, in tribulation.

But

But when, notwithstanding the means he thus graciously employs, to alarm them on the one hand, and to allure them on the other, they fall asleep in security, or slide into carnal indulgence, and conformity to a world that lieth in wickedness, (which, through the artifice of the cunning adversary, they are never more apt to do than after singular comfort and enlargement in duty); then, in order to rouse them from their fatal lethargy, and to prevent their easy return to folly, the Lord not only chastises them with a sharper rod, and perhaps repeats the stroke with increasing violence; but while he lays his hand upon the outward man, he at the same time (that they may taste all the bitterness of sin) withdraws from the inward man the consolations of his Spirit; insomuch that, in the whole of his conduct towards them, they can see nothing but the frowns of a holy and righteous judge.

When after this manner God deals with his children, it is obvious, that he takes the fittest and the most effectual method for gaining the salutary end of affliction, in bringing them back to himself, and rendering them more circumspect, and fearful to offend him.

For if, at the very time they are suffering under the rebukes of his providence, he should solace them with the liberal communications of his love, this would, in many cases, blunt the edge of affliction, and counteract the purpose for which it was appointed.

appointed. They would hardly suspect, that any part of their conduct was very faulty in his sight, so long as they beheld the light of his countenance; nay, rather they would be apt to conclude, that their sufferings were solely owing to the malevolence of men, or took their rise from some natural cause, without any commission from God for the punishment of their sins.

So that, in correcting his children, God appears to act both wisely, and with kindness of love, when, together with providential rebukes, he sometimes withdraws from their souls the consolations of his Spirit, “to lay them in darkness, in the deeps;” to let loose upon them the terrors of the law, and the cutting reproofs of their own consciences, for giving to affliction a keener edge, that it may pierce to the bottom of the sore, which must be laid open at the root before it can be healed: nor is there any saint so perfect, as to have nothing in him amiss that needs to be corrected by such severity.

But, *2dly*, God with-holds from his people, under sufferings, the comforting sense of his love, that he may bring their faith and patience, and other graces, into exercise, for his own glory, and their spiritual improvement. The Lord trieth the righteous, and bringeth them into the net to prove them, Ps. lxvi. 10. 11.

Sometimes he permits the enmity of the world to raise cruel persecution against his church. In
this

this state of public sufferings, when he calls forth his servants, openly to confess him, at the hazard of their effects and lives ; then, as their occasions require, they are most signally supported and strengthened with the comforts of God, “that as their sufferings for Christ abound, so do their consolations by him.” At other times he severely afflicts his children, by with-holding from them the comforts of his love. That he may give them an opportunity of exhibiting to the world the truth and power of religion, while in comfortless distressing circumstances, which tempt to repining and disobedience, they are still seen to maintain their faith and trust in him, a constant regard to his will, and meek resignation to the disposal of his providence. What a proof of unshaken faith, —how honourable to God and to religion, —how confounding to Satan and to an infidel world, was the behaviour of Job, in extreme distress, of whom God testifies to Satan’s face, “Still he holds fast his integrity, though thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause ! When, amidst appearances of divine anger in outward trouble, a cloud, at the same time, drawn over the mind, covers from one’s sight the evidences of God’s love ; this dark disconsolate state, which excludes every cheering ray of light, both without and within, seems the fittest to prove the truth and the strength of faith. It requires no great exertion of faith, to trust, to be resigned,

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when in affliction one's cup of joy overflows, in feeling the comforts of God, and the endearments of his love : while he hears God speaking peace, and tastes that he is gracious, he has then the evidence of sense, and cannot but believe. But when all things wear a dismal aspect ; when appearances in Providence are unfavourable, and the soul gropes disconsolate in desertion and darkness ; when God's way with the entire man is so intricate, that one cannot perceive the design of it, nor its fitness to answer the purposes of divine wisdom and love, as Job complains, ch. xxiii. 8. 9. ; in such a state of darkness, to trust, to be resigned, to be afraid of sin and attentive to duty, this is faith indeed. To rely upon the single testimony of God's word, without asking a sign, any sensible pledge, or proof of his love ; nay, when all appearances are against one ; then to say, with Job, " Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ;"—to believe implicitly, that what is inexplicable to him at present, is ordered in the best manner for his salvation ; and that, when he is tried, he shall come forth as gold : thus to hope against all discouragements, is indeed to be strong in faith, giving glory to God. And this faith, which doth such honour to God, will surely bring comfort in the issue. The end of it shall be fullness of light and strong consolation. The vision is yet for an appointed time ;—though it tarry, wait for it.

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There is indeed one source of comfort that remains to the faint in his most disconsolate state, that is, the testimony of a good conscience. He can appeal to God himself, that the prevailing desire of his heart is towards him, and his chief delight in him. Thus did Job, xiii. 15.; xxiii. 10. 11.; xxvii. 5. 6. "Behold now, (says he), my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high." In support of this testimony, it sometimes pleases God to let in some gleam of light, "lest the spirit should fail before him, and the soul which he hath made." But, notwithstanding this testimony of integrity and faith, a faint may have cause to complain of the absence of God's comforts; nay, that his soul is troubled at his presence, and vexed with his terrors. Thus Heman, while with boldness of faith he avows his sincerity, and his relation to God, as the God of his salvation, still complains, — "My soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh to the grave: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted;" which case carries in it some resemblance to that of the King of saints, whose faith stood firm, his bow abiding in its strength, while his Father's anger put his soul into an agony. Let it here be observed,

That, in the saint's affliction, the bitterest ingredient is either the fear of God's anger for sin, or the want of the comfortable evidence of his love. In all their calamities, it is not the rebuke, but the wrath, of God, which they deprecate. And what

they most ardently pray for, is the pardon of sin, the light of his countenance, and deliverance from trouble, as an evidence of his favour. When afflicted with bodily pains, with the loss of relations and worldly effects, what chiefly distressed Job, was the absence of his God, and his only cry was, — “O that I knew where I might find him !” The import whereof is,

1. That he might have such a discovery of God, in the riches of his grace and mercy, as would encourage his faith, and assure his heart that God loved him, and that the present severity in breaking him with breach upon breach, was the fruit of that love.

2. That he might have access, with confidence, to a throne of grace, and clearly see the way of making his requests known to God, with acceptance, which, at present, was, in a great measure, veiled from his sight, as he complains, *ψ* 8. and 9.

And, 3. That in consequence of freedom and enlargement in prayer, he might be admitted into friendly familiar intercourse with God, of which, in the days of his youth, he had sweet experience, when, as he expresses it, *ch.* xxix. 4. “the secret of God was upon his tabernacle, when the Almighty was yet with him.” This is the true spirit of a genuine saint. The soul which once has had experience of comfortable communion with God, cannot live quiet in want of it ;
and,

and, in the possession thereof, it can patiently, yea joyfully endure sufferings of every kind. — I shall now proceed,

II. To point out some of the reasons every rational soul has for the solicitious exclamation in my text.

Were a guilty world awake ; did men think as men ought to do ; if they thought of God, and of a future state of eternal existence, as they think of the concerns of a present world, the universal cry would be, “ O that I knew where I might find a *departed* God ;” for that he is departed from the human race, in his just displeasure against sin, and doth not now stand in the same friendly terms with men that he did before their criminal apostasy, is a truth too obvious to be denied. Those who assert, that, in this respect, things continue as they were, how much do they mistake and dishonour God ! how do they reproach his work, and betray their ignorance both of God and man ! It is manifest upon the face of the world, it appears from the restless cares and pursuits, the discontent, the complaints, and manifold miseries of men, so inconsistent with a state of innocence and favour with God, that, as they are estranged from God, so he, in justice, is gone far from them. This sad truth is felt and confessed by all the world ; and confessed with indifference, except by a few recovered to God by grace through Christ.

Christ. These having tasted that the Lord is gracious, cannot, with easy minds, bear the hiding of his face, but must cry after him. And all have the same reason for being equally solicitous ; because,

1. The comfort of our being depends upon the favour of God. As no living thing can subsist, nor enjoy the happiness proper to its nature, but by his benign influence, so the favour of God, and the comfortable sense of it, is in its nature, and for duration, the only good proportioned to the nature of man, considered as a rational or an immortal being.

Man is so made, that his happiness, in answer to the demands of his entire nature, cannot be complete, but in contemplating the glorious perfections of God, and in receiving sensible intimations, in his conscience and heart, of his favour and love. Earthly objects are not commensurate to the extensive cravings of man's nature. They only afford the superficial pleasure which arises from the gratification of the lower appetites. They are not at all suited to the soul, — to its contemplative powers and spiritual desires. These require God for their object, to employ, to entertain and content them. The whole world besides, is not adequate to their nature and capacity. Now, without the knowledge of God, as one's own God, without friendly converse with him,
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and the sensible communications of his love, the soul is unhappy. It is miserable in want of its natural support, even when it becomes so degenerate and depraved as to have lost relish for divine things. Amidst the greatest affluence of worldly comforts, it is dissatisfied, it feels a want of something greater and better, and, secretly repining, complains of penury and bondage.

Perhaps the most delicious sensation which soothes and feasts the human mind, is that which is raised by the approbation and applause of the public, on account of mental endowments, especially by the applause of the sensible intelligent part of mankind; but this, even when accompanied with a fullness of every other comfort, is not sufficient so to satisfy and quiet any man's mind, that fretting discontent and envy shall not break his rest, and spoil him of peace and happiness.

Men of genius flatter one another with mutual professions of friendship, as kindred souls; but whatever they may pretend, are they not in their hearts too often envious souls, chagrined and eaten with envy, the one at the reputation of the other, if equal or superior to his own? You will find each of these kindred souls highly pleased, if you deny to his bosom-friend an excellence which you allow to him. So long as a man, ambitious of a name for shining talents, hears of another in the world superior to himself in his profession, he cannot be perfectly happy. He cannot
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be perfectly easy and content with his inferior share of fame ; nor indeed with all the honour the creature can bestow upon him ; as every man's feeling testifies : which intimates to us, that only in God's favour and approbation the soul of man finds settled undisturbed peace, and rests fully satisfied and happy. The most elegant and delicately-seasoned gratifications of sense, are but empty husks to the soul : being remote from its nature, they answer not its desire. No man could ever say, that his portion of the world, of its wealth, of pleasure, of honour and fame, however great, had set his mind at ease in full contentment, and stayed his desire so that it craved no more. These illusions of fancy do but mock the soul, and, by their increase, awaken its keener sense of want, and its more eager thirst after what is still wanting to its happiness.

But farther, as in its nature, so likewise for duration, the sense of God's favour is the only good proportioned to the nature of man. I might observe, that even now, for duration, the sense of God's favour, or the comforts of religion, far excel all sensual gratifications. These are momentary, and ever disappoint expectation. They perish in the very enjoyment, and are often attended with sickly loathing and remorse. But the soul's intercourse with God doth highly rejoice the heart, and the joy is continued in reflection. Besides, the delights of sense, however grateful to a juvenile taste,

taste, when old age or pining sickness overtake us, they lose their relish ; then arrive the evil days, of which it shall be said, “ I have no pleasure in them.” In that declining period of animal nature, of its spirits and taste, so disconsolate to others, in want of God, the testimony of a good conscience, the comforts of God, and the retrospect of a life spent in his service, will, to a pious soul, be the joy and strength of his heart. Joined to this testimony of conscience, the hope of immortality will give a cheerful air to infirm old age. With what divine serenity and joy, amidst the felt frailties of declining life, will a venerable saint raise his hoary head, when he can say, “ I know that my Redeemer liveth ; and that though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God !”

Thus especially, in regard to the soul's immortality, the eternal God is the only good proportioned to its duration. The world passeth away, and all that is in it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life : the pleasure of these ends with this natural life. The soul, that never dies, when separated from the body, is incapable of enjoying them. Nor, when, at the last day, the body shall be raised, and re-united to the soul, is it designed, that man should any more be gratified with the pleasures of sense. The desire of them, indeed, shall cleave to unsanctified souls ; and with their fierce craving, while

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gratification

gratification is denied, shall torment them exceedingly. But the saints, who have acquired and cultivated a taste for spiritual things, being fitted to live upon God himself, independent of all the gratifications of animal life, shall be rendered completely blessed with his everlasting love and glory, continually present to their minds, in all their ravishing delights, to satisfy their most enlarged desires through all the ages of eternity.

2. The second reason and quickening motive to this solicitous inquiry, is the hope of finding God. The exclamation in our text is not the language of extreme distress, embittered by despair, but rather of vehement desire, and ardent resolution, in all the ways of religious industry, animated with hope, to search after God. Whatever you have been, however far your sin hath removed you from God, if you seek him sincerely, there is still hope of recovering his favour. Did men consider, on the one hand, the misery of being under God's displeasure, and, on the other hand, the superlative happiness of being in friendship with him, the present comfort flowing from it, the prospect of its effects in a future state, when this short shadowy life is at an end, how would their hearts exult in the hope of recovering his favour! From such enlivening hope none of us are excluded. While life is continued with us, there is no cause for despair, unless, from the love of sin, we wilfully cast away our hope. Indeed,
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if sinners, before death, “find not the knowledge of God,” and gain his favour, they shall, in fruitless lamentation, bewail their fatal neglect. God is for ever lost to them; and in the loss of him, they are for ever lost. Their existence shall be endless exquisite torment; their employment ever-raging blasphemy in the anguish of despair. But so long as we are permitted to live upon earth, we all may have the hope of escaping this misery, and of rising to consummate joy and glory, in God’s favour and love. Should not this hope, then, awaken and animate our souls? Should it not rouse our active powers to the most vigorous exertion, in striving to obtain the object of our hope? Ought not each of us to say, with grateful admiration, “And is it true that God is to be found? *O that I knew where I might find him!*”

This motive comes with particular force upon the minds of young persons, to quicken and encourage them in the early period of youth to seek God.

Having, in some preceding discourses, endeavoured, from several topics, to persuade to early application to religion, I shall in this beg leave only to call the attention of my young friends to the few following strictures:—That in God’s promise there is special encouragement to the hope of those who seek him early, that they shall succeed: That, in early years, the mind is more ductile,

and susceptible of religious impressions : — That the heart, not being yet practised in sin, is less entangled in the lusts of the world, less biassed with prejudice in favour of any particular idol : — That in advanced life, after having been accustomed to evil, mens natural aversion to God, and to his ways, will grow more headstrong, their contracted inveterate habits of sin will render their finding of God less probable, as they will confirm the natural indisposition of the heart to seek him : — That God is sovereign in dispensing his grace, he being debtor to no man : — That there is a time wherein God is to be found ; which would seem to intimate, that there is also a time in which he may not be found : — That, by rebelling against the light, men grieve the Spirit, and provoke him to depart ; and that, after he hath withdrawn, and sin has taken away the heart, their dead prayers will not bring him back, but rather provoke God to say concerning them, “ My Spirit shall not always strive with this man.” And if he returns not with light and life upon their hearts, they are undone. Although, from some remaining light in conscience, “ they may seek to enter into life, they shall never be able.” Arise, therefore, my dear young friends, to seek God early ; continuing the solicitous inquiry, *O that I knew where I might find him !* — But,

3dly, There is a special call in affliction to inquire after God. Whatever be the immediate cause

cause and instrument of our affliction, God's governing hand is chiefly to be regarded in it. This is the view that Job takes of affliction, "That it comes not forth of the dust," but is either permitted or appointed by God; and therefore, says he, "I would seek unto God;" meekly submitting to the rod in his hand. In affliction we murmur, kick, and spurn against man, not knowing it is against God we spurn; as one, ignorantly in the dark, hastening into a pit, spurns against a friend behind him, who strives to pull him back from destruction, Job xxxiii. 18. There is no affliction whatever, whether it be by bodily sickness, by loss of means, by reproach, or by the distress and death of friends and relations, but is, by the wise disposal of God's providence, for good and profitable instruction to us, for our correction and recovery from sin. The intimation by it to us ever is, that God is displeased with us for sin; and says, that if we turn not from it to him, he will, in just anger, ever afflict us for it.

Affliction also carries in it encouragement to our hope of favour. For every the severest affliction is in measure, and, as such, is for correction; assuring us, that upon our return we shall be received into favour, Job xxxiii. 27. 28. Were it designed for destruction, it would be "a cup of red wine," without any abatement of deserved wrath. By afflicting us in measure, while he spares our
lives,

lives, God is evidently striving with us, to save us from perdition.

Affliction calls us, with particular seriousness, “to seek unto God;” and it seems to be the last effort of grace to recover a sinner; which proving ineffectual, God gives him up to a reprobate mind, to hurry on, unrestrained, in his own chosen course, to destruction: “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more.”

Affliction, by giving us a taste of wrath, warns us of wrath in its extreme to fall upon us, if we turn not at God’s reproof; that, if we are not admonished by such a striking warning, we shall surely perish, and perish with aggravated vengeance, for despising God’s friendly reproof; as he threatens his church for not fearing and receiving instruction from his judgements, Zeph. iii. 1. “Wo to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city; she obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God.” There is, for this reason, in affliction, a peculiarly striking call to the serious inquiry in the text, as, by some sparks of God’s wrath, we are sensibly forewarned of that “full cup of red wrath,” prepared for his incorrigible enemies in the world to come. — I proceed,

III. IN answer to the serious and anxious inquirer after God, to inform him, with certainty, where he is to be found.

Job, though now in distress from the absence of God, was provided with an answer to his own question, when he could say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." — David knew where to find God, when he sung, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord to save us. — Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go in to them." In the promises and prophetic descriptions of the Messiah, men were directed to him in whom God was to be found. "Abraham saw his day, and was glad." In prospect of his advent, the messengers of God cried to the world, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. — Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." Which words seem to be taken up by Jesus, the Messiah, with application to himself, when he cried in the temple, on the last and great day of the feast, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Hear now the joyful sound still more clear, with fullness of evidence in the gospel: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Christ's messengers, who bring good tidings, who publish peace, who bring good tidings of good, who publish salvation through the Son of God, manifested in the flesh."

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“ For God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them who were under the law.” To accomplish this great design, he sent him to be a propitiation for sin, in giving his life a ransom for men : “ He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” And now God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself : “ Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sin.” — “ Ye who sometimes were far off, and who are still far off, may be made nigh by the blood of Jesus.” Peace from God, through Christ, is preached to all of the human race. There is no difference made between nations or families, or ranks or characters. The same God is rich in mercy unto all who call upon him ; “ for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” — Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ; “ for whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed.” Hear the Son of God calling from heaven, in his Father’s name, and in his own, “ Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden. — Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” Find the knowledge of Christ, and you find God in him. He is now in the court of heaven, appearing there, in our nature, in whom, and through whose intercession, God is to be found. Him whom the Jews slew, and hanged on a tree, him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince

Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins !

But where and how is Christ to be found ?

Where is he to be found ? In the scriptures. These are they which testify of him. In these sacred oracles, it is written by inspiration, that God sent his Son to die a sacrifice for sin, that we might live through him. Believe this record of God, that he hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son, and you shall ever live in favour with God. By faith in the word concerning Christ, you are really possessed of Christ. " Say not, Who shall ascend into heaven, (that is, to bring Christ down from above), or, Who shall descend into the deep, (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). The word is nigh thee," Rom. x. 8. Perceive the faithful testimony of God in the word, with trust in it, pleading Christ's merits, and God's promise through him. If, after this manner, you come to God, in Christ's name, you give him glory. And thus, but in no other way, shall you find favour in his sight.

If you ask, How shall I find him in the scriptures ? I answer, By looking into them with diligent search for him. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in a field, or like a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls.

Although faith be the gift of God, the effect of preventing grace, (as the apostle says, " When

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it pleased God to call me by his grace, and to reveal his Son in me, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood);” yet, for obtaining this gift, we are to apply to the study of these sacred oracles, by reading, by attending upon the public ministry of them; by serious meditation and prayer; our spirits, in these exercises, making diligent search for a satisfying discovery of the grounds of faith and hope, in order to a settled rest of soul upon them, with assurance of understanding. When we are engaged in this serious inquiry, praying with solicitous concern, *O that I knew where I might find him!* it is then the Spirit of God breaks in upon the soul with the light of faith. Awake, therefore, to thought and prayer. Awake to such a sense of your extreme misery without God, that concern to find him may, above all other cares, have the ascendant. Fix it as your determined purpose, that you shall exert, and continue to exert, the utmost vigour of your soul to find Christ. Settle this as your last end, as the only valuable purpose of your being; and resolve, that though, by the most vigorous efforts of your powers, you cannot strike the least spark of divine light and life out of your dark and dead heart, it shall, however, be your incessant earnest endeavour, by all means, as commanded, to obtain precious faith, in dependence upon God’s grace. And while you labour, through thick darkness, to penetrate into light, sensible of your insufficiency,

sufficiency, by searching, to find out God, pray, with your eye directed to himself, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.”— Seek him on bed, in the silent watches of the night. Rise in the morning, and go in search of him, from duty to duty, lamenting after him with weeping and supplication. Let no delay of answer discourage your persevering importunity; but continue instant in prayer, ever acknowledging, in a humble sense of your unworthiness, that all your expectation is from sovereign grace.

If you are favoured with any degree of life to hope, be thankful; nor say, in peevish discontent, you have gained nothing, because you have not been raised to full assurance. By the way, God often vouchsafes this to the weak, when he denies it to the strong, who, in regard of their superior strength of judgement, are more able to live by faith; and therefore Christians have more of the joy of assurance in their youthful days, “the days of their espousals,” than afterwards, when, at full age, by reason of use or habit, they are of riper judgement, and more firmly rooted in the faith. Mean-time labour for assurance, in the diligent use of all means: “Give all diligence, to the full assurance of hope to the end.”

Some relics of light in conscience may move you to seek God in prayer; but while you seek him with a languid unserious spirit, (like those who

offered the lame and sick), you shall never find him. Strive to enter in, and you shall succeed. O pray that the new creature may be formed within you, whose generous heroic nature it is, to rise superior to all stumbling-blocks and discouragements.

In conclusion, let all the reasons suggested excite our solicitous concern to find the knowledge of God, and to obtain favour in his sight.

Ye who forget God, consider what a dreadful hazard you run, in suffering the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, or even the intense study of science, to divert you from seeking and finding God. Consider that the world, and the fashion of it, are fast passing away. Presume not upon length of days. Amidst your flattering hopes of life, you may be suddenly cut off; and if you are taken away in your sin and unbelief, you are lost, for ever lost. You will, in the other world, feel what it is to be without God. You will passionately wish, and wish in vain, you had seized your opportunity while you had it. Oh the sad difference you shall find between your present state and what it shall then be! Here, perhaps, you live at ease, faring sumptuously every day; there, stripped of every comfort, you shall not, under extreme tortures, find one refreshing drop of water. Now, perhaps, you are so vexed with straits and pains,
that

that you are weary of life ; but, in the other world, you shall find the most afflicting condition here to be a paradise, compared with hell, where your anguish shall be heightened, and rendered still more intolerable, by the despair of escaping from that place of torment. “ Consider this, ye who forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, when there shall be none to deliver ;” no entertaining companion, no loving friend, to divert or assuage your pains ; when there shall be no Saviour to intercede for you. Reject the benefit of Christ’s sacrifice now, and you have nothing to look for, in a future world, but “ fearful judgement, and fiery indignation, to devour you for ever,” Heb. x. 27. Awake, therefore, from the enchantment of sin, to seek God, and follow on to know him. Keep out of the vain course of the world, walk in the footsteps of the flock, and you shall surely get out of darkness into light, and find God, to your present consolation, and your everlasting joy. They who sow in tears, shall reap in joy : “ He that goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” Then the anxious exclamation, *O that I knew where I might find him !* shall be happily exchanged for that grateful acknowledgement, to the praise of divine grace, “ I have found him whom my soul loveth.” *Amen.*

S E R M O N X.

God the desire and joy of the faint.

I S A I A H, xxvi. 9.

*With my soul have I desired thee in the night ;
yea, with my spirit within me will I seek
thee early.*

SUCH warm expressions of inward devotion have, in every age of the world, been ridiculed by vain ungodly men, as the language of enthusiasm, the reveries of a wild overheated imagination. They presumptuously revile what they do not understand ; and hate what, for want of a spiritual faculty, they do not feel, and are unable to conceive. They may indeed know, and in the moments of cool reflection they do perceive with pain, that something greatly superior to what they possess, or can attain to of themselves, is necessary to their inward peace and satisfaction, that fullness of self-enjoyment at which they aspire. But, alas ! notwithstanding this self-conviction, they foolishly reject the counsel of God against themselves, and set at nought the alone source whence
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true peace and joy can find access to the disquieted guilty mind. You will see, that I mean the religion of Jesus; without the knowledge and belief of which, the sinner must for ever remain far off from God and happiness. But when, by the power of the Holy Ghost, it gains admission into the heart, a new supernatural principle is formed there, which elevates the soul above sublunary things, and leads its view, its governing aim, from earth to heaven, from the creature to the creator, fitting the spirit of man for communion and fellowship with God, the Father of spirits, in faith and love. Now the soul, rising from its debasement, recovers its true nobility, in taking its flight up to God as its chief good; and having found him, hath reached the utmost boundary of its wish; and so returns into its quiet rest.

To maintain constant friendly intercourse with God in all circumstances, is the saint's great concern, his chiefest joy. While he finds himself so favoured, his peace stands unshaken, amidst the various vicissitudes of time. In the general course of things, it is God he chiefly regards, the wise and powerful administration of his all-governing providence. In all events, of favourable and unfavourable aspect, of judgements and of mercies, he sees and reveres God, studious in them to hold intercourse with him, humbly waiting for some special

special good by them to himself, and to the whole church of Christ.

Amidst the tumultuous reeling of nations, and the noise of floods lifting up their voice, he rests serenely quiet, in hope that all shall issue gloriously. He sees him who sits at the helm, that the mighty hand of God rules in the raging of the sea, lifting up its waves, and stilling them again; that, by his unerring wisdom, all things, even seemingly cross dispensations, conspire together for bringing about his great designs. In the apparent confusion of things, the believer rests satisfied, that God is regularly going on with his own scheme, and waits in joyful expectation of its certain accomplishment, to God's everlasting honour, the salvation of his people, and the conversion or overthrow of his enemies.

This book of Isaiah is full of clear and lofty predictions of the coming of the Messiah, and of the happy days of the gospel under his reign. In this and the preceding chapter, the Spirit of God evidently points at this great event; in the certain prospect of which, the prophet rejoices with exalted songs of praise, and, in the language of holy confidence, excites the people to trust and rejoice with him; knowing, that as God was faithful who had promised, he was able also to perform it; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. To remove their doubts and unbelieving fears, arising from many discouraging appearances,

appearances, he assures them, that the judgements upon the Jewish and other nations were only means in the hand of Providence, to usher in, more conspicuously, the promised Messiah; and, in this belief, he exhorts them to help forward the accomplishment of the promise, by praying, after his example, in faith, that the day-spring from on high might soon visit a dark benighted world, and the Sun of righteousness arise, on the habitations of cruelty, with healing in his wings; when, by the fullness of gospel-light, not only the veil on Moses's face should be taken away, but the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil spread over all nations should be destroyed. Happy and glorious days! when the Gentiles, delivered out of Heathenish darkness and idolatry, and the Jews, freed from their burdensome rites, should worship God, the only true and living God, in spirit and in truth.

With what propriety then might the Old-Testament saints, looking forward to those times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord when the desire of all nations should fill the earth with his glory, with what propriety (I say) might they adopt the devout language of the text: "*With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.*"

These words justly mark the distinguishing character of a real saint:

1. By his habitual desire; and

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2. By

2. By the manner in which his desire operates.
With his soul he *desireth* God.

With his soul and spirit he *seeketh* God in the *night and early*.—Viewing the text in this light, let us,

I. Consider the character of a real saint, as it is distinguished by his *desire*. With his soul he *desireth* God.

In illustration of this, let it be observed, That the *desire* or prevailing disposition of the mind towards this or that object, ascertains one's true character, with more precision, in most cases, than his outward actions or conduct. It is true, if one's desire be sincerely towards God, the tenor of his life cannot contradict, but must correspond to that desire. Yet, in certain cases, a man may act one way, and his desire take a contrary course. His actions may be religious to appearance, while his eye looks askint to some worldly interest, to which he profanely designs to make his assumed form of godliness subservient : yea, he may for a while go the round of devotional exercises, and may thereby be deceived into an opinion that all is right, when in truth he has no desire after God, no delight in duty, but means only to relieve his troubled mind from fear of wrath, and to shield himself from the smitings of conscience with which it arraigns him for sin regarded in the heart. It is therefore unsafe

safe to form a conclusive judgement of our character from any thing that is merely external.

Many who are spiritually dead, think favourably of themselves, because they do some things that are materially good, and are not in all respects as other men are. And some who would be thought wise, become so sottish, at the expence of much labour, that they quiet themselves with a sort of instinctive virtue which hath no reference to God or the world to come. But our safety lies in looking inward, that we may judge of our character by the prevailing habitual desires of our hearts: for such as these are, whether good or bad, such likewise are we in the sight of God.

In the life of a hypocrite, and of a true Christian, there is no doubt a real difference which might be seen, could we follow each of them into their secret retirements, or even trace them exactly through all their public transactions. But on the imperfect survey, we must necessarily take of them, the conduct of both may appear equally fair. Between Judas and John there was no visible difference, either in profession or practice, whereby the hypocrite could be distinguished from the saint. But there was an essential difference in the desires and affections of their hearts, known only to God, who seeth not as man seeth, and whose judgement is always according to truth.

That the invisible God should be the object of desire to such creatures as we are, may appear inconceivably mysterious to those who know not God, nor the workings of devout affections towards him. Being "sensual, having not the spirit," they can form no conception of desire rising above the objects of sense. To these, indeed, the soul in its present state of depravity is wholly confined. But when, by grace, it recovers its native health and vigour, it riseth upward to the Father of spirits, its chiefest joy. No longer satisfied with this vain world, or the things of the world, it aspires to those things which are above, breathing after its original glory and felicity, the image, the friendship, and the enjoyment of God.

The peculiar nature of that desire which distinguishes the saint will appear more fully if we take a view, *first*, of its divine object; and, *secondly*, of its commanding influence over the whole man.

1. The object on which the desire of the saint terminates is God himself. He contemplates the infinite perfections of his nature, his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth: he sees all those shining with united splendor in Jesus Christ, who is emphatically styled *the desire of all nations*; because in him these perfections are displayed in such an amiable light as would recommend him to the esteem and love of all, if their eyes were opened to behold his glory.

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He is sensible, that without an interest in the friendship of this all-perfect being, the weak dependent creature must be miserable. He therefore desires his favour from a principle of regard to his own safety, and can find no rest while there remains any doubt of his acceptance with him.

He is further sensible, that the friendship of God contributes no less to his honour than to his security, and therefore desires it on that account. What real satisfaction can a thinking person derive from all the vain honours this world can confer, if haunted with jealousies that he who is higher than the highest looks upon him with contempt and abhorrence? But if persuaded in his own mind that he possesseth the favour and approbation of God, though treated by a blind malignant world as the filth and off-scouring of all things, he can comfort himself with the Apostle Paul's conclusion, "He that judgeth me is the Lord."

But chiefly the saint desires God, on account of the glorious excellencies of his nature, in which he greatly delights, and to which he most ardently aspires to be conformed; esteeming the resemblance of God to be at once the glory and happiness of his nature, as he is thereby rendered meet for communion with God here, and the full enjoyment of him in the future state. For if desire be sincere, it will stop nowhere short of the absolute perfection of holiness

ness in the heavenly world. Paul, who excelled in gifts and graces, and was distinguished by more abundant labours in the service of Christ, yet did not think that he had already attained, either was already perfect. This one thing, (said he), I do, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

As this desire of the saint is the breathing of love, it is not only solicitous for good to himself in particular by the favour of God, and the benign influence of his perfections, but it rises to zealous concern for the most diffusive advancement of the honour of God, “that the whole earth may be filled with his glory,—that from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, God’s name may be praised;”—that the strife of contending empires, and the shaking of nations, may contribute to the brighter appearance of the the desire of all nations; and that God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may be highly glorified in the prosperity and enlargement of the church which he hath redeemed, and in the salvation of multitudes out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. “Let the people praise thee, O Lord, let all the people praise thee. O that the salvation of God were come out of Zion!” This is the genuine language of a saint, and such is his desire with respect to its object.

2. Let us now take a view of its commanding influence

influence over the whole man in his various pursuits, and natural desires after other things.

The Author of our being hath planted in our constitution certain desires or appetites suited to those materials which are necessary for our sustenance and comfort in a present world. These bodily cravings, by their regular returns, keep the principle of self-preservation awake; and therefore their demands not only may, but ought to be attended to. But man, in his degenerate state, confines his whole attention to the low gratifications of sense. Solicitous only about "what he shall eat, and what he shall drink, and wherewithall shall he be clothed," like the Gentiles who know not God, he employs all his care and activity in providing for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Now the spiritual desire I am speaking of, when kindled in the soul, doth not extinguish these natural appetites. It only breaks their dominion, restrains their excess, and keeps them within their proper limits, in subordination to the empire of reason and conscience. It allows the gratification of them in subserviency to its own more exalted aims, and in such measures as may tend to raise the soul to God, instead of rendering it disaffected to, or unfit for his service, according to the apostolic injunction, "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

While

While we thus attend to the cravings of the inferior appetites in due subordination to the higher pursuits of the soul, we may truly be said to have but *one* object of desire, even that one good thing in which the Psalmist placed his chief delight when he expressed himself thus, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none in all the earth whom I desire besides thee: my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”

This desire having once gained the ascendant, shall ever afterwards maintain its influence. Tho’ it may suffer abatement, it shall never die, but prove a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. The exquisite pleasure flowing from this heavenly desire, far surpassing all the delights of sense, not only tends to keep it alive, but likewise to maintain its superiority. Besides, the same God who kindled it in the renewed soul, hath engaged himself, by covenant and promise, to guard and preserve it to the end of life.

In proportion to the growing prevalence of this desire, the love of earthly things dies apace. It is never indeed wholly extinguished in this life; some remains of this body of death, will cleave to the most improved saints, till their earthly tabernacles be dissolved, which must give rise to many perplexing thoughts, and painful longings for complete deliverance. “In this tabernacle they grope being burthened, having a desire to depart,

part, and to be with Christ. But tho' they may not perceive it, the earthly affections are gradually losing ground, while the spiritual life, like the morning-light, is still advancing, "shining more and more unto the perfect day."

The hypocrite may appear to be gradually dying to the world, and growing indifferent to its pleasures; but this seeming mortification is not owing to any root or growth of spiritual desire, but merely to the decay of nature; such as Barzillai pleaded in excuse for declining to accept David's invitation to his court: "How long, (said he), have I to live, that I should go up with the King unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or singing women? Wherefore should thy servant be yet a burden to my Lord the King?"

Whereas the saint's growing indifference to earthly things, is not the effect of declining nature, but of an improved taste for the comforts of God, which deadens his relish for the pleasures of sense. Being "risen with Christ, he seeks the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Every kind of life desires the aliment that suits its nature; and the life of God in the soul necessarily breathes in desire after God, its parent, as the natural support of

its being, without which it cannot live. “ They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” The earthly man, destitute of this divine life, cannot, with all the powers he derives from the first Adam, rise above earthly things, “ the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” He may wish to escape the effects of God’s anger, and to be favoured with impunity in his sinful course ; but he can never desire God on account of his own excellence, or for the communications of his grace, that he may be a partaker of his holiness. Wanting this desire, and the life that inspires it, he treats with ridicule every one that pretends to it ; and because he finds nothing of that kind in himself, he presumptuously concludes that it hath no existence at all. Whereas he ought to see, and to deplore, the dead, corrupted state of his soul in want of it, and, with tears of lamentation for his misery, to ask it from God. Surely it is easy for him to bestow it ; and, according to the necessity of our souls, it is what he has promised, as his own free gift through Jesus Christ, who died that we might have this spiritual life, and have it here, as the beginning of eternal life hereafter. Whoever dies without it, dies indeed, and dies for ever. “ Except a man be born again, born spirit of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

For

For a farther account of this desire, let us consider,

II. THE manner in which it operates, expressed in the text, “by seeking God, with soul and spirit, in the night and early.”

Soul and spirit are, in scripture, used indiscriminately, to denote the same thing, viz. the spiritual substance, with all its faculties, which was breathed into man at his first creation; and they are here introduced together, to express the sincerity and intenseness of the united powers of the soul in their actings upon God, particularly in prayer.

I. The words express the soul's sincerity in the exercises of devotion; which implies the exercise of the mind, in viewing God in the glory of his majesty. Many, under the influence of custom, and the commandments of men, observe forms of devotion, without the light and power of it, blindly resting upon their dead superstitious usages, as meritorious of heaven. But a true believer, in his religious addresses, has God himself in his eye, the authority of his command, and the encouragement of his grace, by which his devotion is influenced. Under impressions of God's glorious holiness and grace, he draws near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. There is a similarity between all the people of God in the nature of their devotional exercises.

What is said of Moses, of Abraham, and of other worthies, in their transactions with God, holds true of every saint. God Almighty appeared to Abraham, and spake to him; Abraham, with solemn reverence, speaks to him again. God and Moses speak together, face to face. Isaiah and Hezekiah direct their prayers to God, in view of him as Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, dwelling between the cherubims. In like manner, though not with equal elevation of soul, every believer addresses God, with a spiritual understanding of the one true God whom he worships. In acts of devotion, he sits himself as in the presence of God, saying, in the spirit and words of Paul, with his soul lifted up to heaven, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family, in heaven and in earth, is named." Such are the desires of the renewed soul towards God, which the text is meant to hold forth; but the words farther imply, as expressive of sincerity, that this desire does not originate from, or terminate in, the effects of God's providential care of the body, supplying its wants, or healing its diseases, but flows, as has been above observed, from that which suits its own spiritual nature and taste, and tends to its essential comfort and improvement; that is, God himself, the intimations of his favour, and the communications of his grace. Agreeably to this, we find the saints every where breathing after him, for what he is in himself,

himself, possessed of all possible perfection, the Parent of all good : “ Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth ; cause thy face to shine upon us. There be many that say, Who will shew us any good, the riches, the pleasures, the honours, of this world ? but, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.” Thus are their desires immediately directed to God, the natural, the substantial good of the soul ; while they desire other things, even the ordinances of divine appointment, not for their own sake, but as they afford evidences of God’s favour, advantages for his service, and fit them for the enjoyment of him. Hence, when the Psalmist prays, “ O send out thy light, and thy truth, let them lead me, let them bring me to thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles,” he does not stop here, but immediately adds, “ Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.”

2. The words of the text express, not only the sincerity, but the fervour of spirit, in which desire operates towards God. In viewing his matchless excellencies, the high importance of his favour, the superlative honour and happiness in his special love and fellowship, and feeling, at the same time, how far short we are of that perfection in light and love to which the soul is designed to rise,

rise, all its affectionate powers are exerted, and drawn forth, sometimes even with agony of desire toward this one good thing, in which all other concerns are swallowed up and lost. As one ready to perish with hunger, desires bread, and bread only, or burning with thirst, desires drink, and drink only; such fervent earnestness of desire the saints breathe in prayer, for the sense of God's favour and love, as the comfort of their life, nay as the one thing needful, without which they cannot live. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, the living God. O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. Let my cry come near before thee; let my soul live, and it shall praise thee. O that I knew where I might find thee! O be not silent to me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit." In these and many such like spirited expressions, the saints exhibit both the deliberate exercise of judgement, and the most vehement ardour of affection, in their addresses to God; and the more clear and enlarged their views are of God, the more fervent are their spirits, the higher do their affections rise. Who can behold the majesty of the God of Israel, "riding upon the heaven in the help of his people, and in his excellency on the sky?" Who can seriously attend to the important everlasting

lasting interest of man, depending on the favour of the Eternal Jehovah, and be quite cool and dispassionate, and not feel his soul on fire with desire?

A farther view we shall have of this fervent spirit, while I consider the seasons in which desire is here said to operate, — in the *night*, and *early*. — Which implies,

1. That the exercise of desire in prayer is habitual. Although it be not at all times equally intense and lively, it is in some degree habitual and incessant; so that the saint can never altogether cease from praying with desire. He who is moved only with a sudden flash of affection, seems fervent in prayer for a time; but as this affection, which has no root or spring of life to feed it, gradually decays, so dies desire and delight in prayer; and having lost delight in prayer, after having drudged in it with listless heaviness for a time, he at length gives it up altogether, and so becomes a barren apostate from God, twice dead, plucked up by the root. But they who are inspired with the light of life, with faith and hope, and are under the warm impressions of redeeming love, must necessarily feel longing desires after farther displays of the divine glory, after nearer intercourse with the beloved of their souls; and hence their earnest persevering supplications at the throne of grace, “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death.” Thus do they “cry unto God
with

with the heart, and pray without ceasing." With the great High Priest in their eye, his merit, his power, and his tender compassions, they live and die praying.

2. The expression farther implies the conscientious observance of the stated hours of prayer and praise, the morning and evening sacrifice. I need not stay to shew particularly how reasonable it is that we should begin and end the day with prayer and thanksgiving to God. This is his command, that we should wait on him, at these seasons particularly, with our dutiful acknowledgements for mercies received, and humble supplications for those we still stand in need of. Nor need I inform you, that, in obedience to the divine command, it hath ever been, and is now, the practice of all the saints, to direct their prayers to God in the morning, and in the evening not to be silent. They who occasionally omit these stated seasons of devotion, in answer to the call of worldly cares, of company and avocations, taking up the task in fits, it may be only on the sabbath-day, or when a few minutes hang heavy upon their hand, or when trouble is upon them, such give a very suspicious discovery of their Christian character. They lie open to the cutting interrogatory with which Job reproaches the hypocrite, "Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" What reason have such to
fear,

fear, that having slighted God's call in his time, they shall not find him, though they may seek him afterwards with tears, in their own time and way? In opposition to this character, the sincere conscientious Christian dare not absent from the place and hour of prayer. Obedient to the endearing command of his God and Father, and longing for the communications of his grace, he rejoices when called to join with those who are going up to the temple to worship; and, in his secret retirements, lifts up his soul to God, as David did, in the evening, and morning, and at noon, praying in these acceptable times, in full assurance of being heard. And though he finds himself in a dull torpid temper of mind, he will, in obedience to God's command, and in hope of quickening by his grace, set about the duty in its proper season. If he sees before him a croud of business which requires dispatch, he will rise the earlier for prayer, and thereby prevent interruption of his duty to God, by the intrusion of worldly cares. Should some hasty summons that he must necessarily attend, call him from his closet, in that case he must content himself with a few thoughts and ejaculations; while he grieves that he has not more time to spend with his God.—
But,

3. The exercise here expressed brings to view, devotion, in singular ardour, rising to such vigorous exertion, as carries the soul beyond the or-

dinary rate and stated hours of prayer common to the saints, to spend most, if not the whole of the night, in heavenly meditation and prayer, according to what the Psalmist asserts to have been his own exercise in particular circumstances : “ I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night. At midnight I will rise to give thanks to thee. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried. Mine eyes prevented the night-watches, that I might meditate on thy word.”

Here it seems proper to observe two things by way of caution : On the one hand, that neither the Psalmist's practice, nor anything in the word of God, gives countenance to the stated observance of devotional night-vigils, in a continued succession of devotees, when there is nothing particular in the state of their minds, nor in their circumstances, urging them to it. This is the unwarrantable prescription of superstition and will-worship, after the commandments and doctrines of men. It is also to be observed, on the other hand, that a godly person seldom sleeps out the night, without some wakeful intervals of devout communing with his heart ; and perhaps the saints freest and most delightful moments of intercourse with Heaven, are in these silent meditations and prayers of the night, when the din of the world is hushed, and their eyes and ears are shut against the business and amusements of the day ; yea, from the habit of anxious desire after Christ, thoughts
of

of him so naturally rush upon a spiritual mind, that with propriety one may say, “I sleep, but my heart waketh.” Something like this, therefore, will be found in the ordinary temper and exercise of a Christian; but to rise at midnight to pray and give thanks, and, after preventing the watches of the night, to renew the same exercise early, is only called for on extraordinary occasions either of singular distress, or of joy, whether personal or public, which so entirely occupy the thoughts, that the mind cannot get itself disengaged from them. Thus, when one is in a very distressful state, through unbelieving fears about his spiritual condition, he is then so troubled, that he cannot rest till that fear is taken off; or when, on the other hand, he is in a very joyful frame, from full assurance of the divine favour, and a signal vouchsafement of intimate communion with God, the comfort is then so exquisite, that he cannot easily let it go, but must indulge its continuance, the sweetness thereof causing the heart of him that is laid to sleep, to speak, and sing for joy. When David’s soul is sore vexed, he all the night makes his bed to swim, he waters his couch with his tears. In deep distress, his eyes were held waking, and his soul ran in the night. He likewise records the joyful seasons, when the comforts of God had the same effect upon him, to keep his eyes waking, in affording him songs in the night, as the saints, when joyful in glory, are said to sing aloud upon their beds.

Farther, when the judgements of God are in the earth, threatening national distress. When such alarming appearances of divine anger as now hang over us, call to humiliation and prayer, then it is that the children of Zion are awake, and, for Zion's sake, give themselves no rest, till God make Jerusalem the praise of the whole earth.

In the present calamitous quarrel between Great Britain and her colonies, in which the hand of God is visibly lifted up to chastise both parties, men take different sides with keenness of zeal, justifying and blaming the one or the other, according as they are affected, without duly attending to the general interest of both. They do not consider, that God commands the warriors as “his sanctified ones;”—that he calls his mighty ones for his anger;—that the Lord of hosts gathers the kingdoms of nations;—that he mustereth the host of the battle;—that the weapons of destruction are the weapons of his indignation;—that the sword of the Lord is bathed in heaven, and is come down upon the people of his anger to judgement;—that he commands it to slay, and multitudes to fall, every one by the sword of his brother;—that through the wrath of the Lord of hosts the land is darkened, when the battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.—Such is the majestic language of scripture, directing us to behold the judicial hand of God now lifted up. His complaint is, that in such events
men

men will not see him, nor learn righteousness; and therefore he threatens to destroy, and deliver up to slaughter, the people that will not understand nor regard the operations of his hand. In similar circumstances of public calamity, it was usual with the saints in former times to betake themselves to fasting and prayer; wishing their head were waters, and their eyes fountains of tears, that they might weep day and night for the slain of their people, and for sin which slew them. In their solicitous concern, highly awakened by the frightful symptoms of God's displeasure, the true children of Zion rise above themselves; the fervour of their devotion exceeds its ordinary standard, that as they cry in the day-time, so neither can they in the night-season be silent.

In like manner, their spirits, highly elevated with joy upon the return of God's favour, in signal deliverance from public distress, in answer to their humble supplications, his song is with them in the night, affording them sweeter solace than balmy sleep.

As to the state of mind expressed in this singular height of devotion, I shall only add to what has been said, that it represents,

1. A soul thoroughly awake, with the great importance of things unseen and eternal full in its eye, having their proper weight upon the spirit, to raise in it those affections they are in their nature fit to inspire; — and,

2. That

2. That being awake, it is freely disposed, and heartily willing, to arise to action. One may awake to some sense of the infelicity of a sinful state, of the goodness of religion, and may have some desire to be in the happy state of the righteous, by being like them, and yet be so far under the power of a drowsy humour, so far in bondage to his fleshly ease and sloth, as to be disinclined to action. The desire of the sluggard killeth him, or torments him with self-condemnation ; for his hands refuse to work ; his prevailing sloth suggesting against present application to labour this frivolous excuse, “ Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber ; ” let me alone at present, a little hence I will rise to work. But my text exhibits a soul awake, and alive at the same time, powerfully inclined to action : loosed from the bonds of sloth, the spirit rises superior to the inclination of sluggish nature, and, with prevailing willingness, engages in devotional exercises, when nature would call to rest. When desire is high, when need is pressing, and hope is lively, then the expectation of some rich boon from God, easily invites one from his couch, the soul preferring freedom of converse with God, to the soft allurements of sleep. Enlivened with the spirit of life from Christ, the saint can now say, “ My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed. I will pray, I will sing and give praise.” He no longer pleads with complaint of partial indisposition ; that “ the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”

weak." The whole man is engaged in this work : " His heart and flesh cry out for the living God," saying, "When shall I come and appear before God? Such lively exercise of desire, so seriously instant in seeking and serving God night and day, carries comfort in its very bosom, and will be followed with a still higher degree of it. Although it struggles for a time in agonizing distress against misgiving doubts, it ordinarily issues in strong consolation, by liberal discoveries and communications of divine love and grace, through Christ, unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ. The painful exercise will probably be recompensed with such a solacing message as was brought by the angel of God to Daniel, after mourning and praying for some weeks, " O man greatly beloved, fear not ; for from the first day thou didst set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before God, thy words were heard," thy prayers and thy tears came up for a memorial before God. This consolatory suggestion by the Spirit to the heart, as in the mean time it would spread through the soul a fullness of heavenly joy, so, if followed with watchful humility, and not abused to presumptuous security, it may prove the means of establishing the Christian in a calm state of habitual assurance and peace through life ; and of rendering his hope triumphant at the hour of death, by the remembrance.

brance of past times, in which he tasted the sweetness of communion with God.

It was from a recollection of this kind, that Jacob derived support and consolation in his last sickness, when, as we read, Gen. xlviii. 2. 3. “he strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed, and said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me.”

CONCLUSION.

From this subject we learn, that in order to our forming a true judgement of ourselves, we are to enquire into the prevailing desire of our hearts. It is this that determines our real character; and any one who means not to impose on himself may, upon a little reflection, discover whether his desire be prevailingly towards the world, and the gratifications of sense, or towards God: if towards the world, he is earthly and sensual; if towards God, he is spiritual and heavenly.

To what has been said of the nature of this pure desire, I shall only add, that it allows one no quiet, while in doubt of the favour of God. To be quite easy in mind, while one is uncertain whether God favours him or not, betrays rooted infidelity of heart, and profane contempt of God.

Again, The desire of the life of God in the soul, being restless for assurance of God's love, is ever active in searching diligently for him, in all the ways of commanded duty, private and public, in
which

which he is to be found, trying them repeatedly with increasing ardor, even after repeated disappointment of hope.

You are not to call in question the sincerity of your desire, altho' it does not raise you at mid-night to pray. There is no prescribed rule for this. It is but the occasional natural effect of some perplexing trouble, or of an overflow of comfort. To make a custom of formal nocturnal devotion, without a necessary call to it, from such an extraordinary state of mind, is a superstitious Popish penance, to which no command of God subjects us. God, who knows our frame, bids us not consult the prosperity of the soul by an over-rigorous chastisement of the body. The delicacy of our constitution cannot bear the austerities of severe fasting and watching, without prejudice to our health. And from the intimate connection between the two parts of our composition, when the temper of the body is relaxed and disordered by voluntary neglect, the mind in proportion is rendered unfit for its proper exercise, and thereby the progressive prosperity of the soul is retarded. On the other hand, pampering the body, and immoderate indulgence to sleep, debilitate the vigour of our intellectual faculties, which are usually most lively, as early in youth, so likewise in the morning of the day. We ought therefore carefully to avoid the two hurtful extremes of excessive rigor and unrestrained indulgence.

We may think we desire God, because we wish to be happy in escaping the effects of his wrath for sin. But in order to our being capable of desiring God preferably to all the delights of sense, to all created enjoyments, we must be born again. It is the spirit of life from Christ that ascends in desire to God, in answer to the voice from heaven, "Come up hither." And after this desire is kindled, we must be careful, to keep the sacred fire ever burning on our hearts, ever rising in its fervour, by abstaining from what tends to damp its flame; and especially by the habitual exercise of a contemplative faith upon the enlivening comforts of the gospel, its precious promises of present grace and future glory; waiting upon God continually in all the ways of duty for the conveyance of fresh supplies of light and life by these channels; waiting for him also in the way of his judgements, with trust in the wisdom, power, and mercy of God, for good to the public, by his public chastisements; and for good to ourselves, by our personal afflictions; in hope that, with respect to both, his kind design by all the severities of his providence is to humble and prove us, to do us good at the latter end.

If you have received any spiritual advantage at this time, tenderly watch over its preservation, hold fast what you have, that none may take your crown.—"Be not high-minded, but fear." By faith, by humble dependence on God's grace, by
prayer,

prayer, by watching unto prayer, you stand. Thus shall you preserve your comfort, and honourably support the character you bear, to the glory of God, and the edification of his church, going on prosperously from strength to strength, till you finish your course with joy. *Amen.*

S E R M O N X I.

On discerning the Lord's body.

I C O R. xi. 29.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, *not discerning the Lord's body.*

NUMBERS are in use of receiving the sacramental elements, who want the knowledge and disposition requisite for partaking aright of the Lord's supper; and therefore, as often as they eat and drink, instead of shewing forth the Lord's death, according to his appointment, they eat and drink damnation, or judgement, to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body.

As the words of the text express that defect of the mind which occasions unworthy communicating, and at the same time imply the gracious quality that fits for partaking worthily, it will be allowed, that they contain a most proper subject of discourse, on a day of preparation for the solemn service to which we are called.

I propose, therefore, to enquire what is included in *discerning the Lord's body*, which the Apostle represents as absolutely necessary for avoiding the condemnation of those, who, by eating and drinking unworthily, are guilty of the body and
blood

blood of the Lord : After which I shall direct you to the proper improvement of what may be said.

That we may understand what is meant by *discerning the Lord's body*, two things must be attended to.

1. The object presented to our view ;
2. The act of the believing mind in discerning that object.

1. THE object presented to our view is *the Lord's body*, i. e. our Lord himself in his entire human nature : For many passages occur in the sacred writings, where the whole man is denoted by one essential part of his constitution ; and both soul and body are meant to be included when one of them only is expressed. Of this we have a clear proof in Paul's exhortation to the believing Romans, chap. xii. 1. "I beseech you, brethren, that ye present your *bodies* a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." It can admit of no question, that by presenting their bodies, he means also their souls, the devoting themselves wholly, soul, spirit, and body, unto God ; because, without this, their bodily service would be a dead, not a living sacrifice, and could not be acceptable to God, who demands the heart ; and, where the heart is wanting, will be satisfied with nothing else. But, to speak more directly to the object in view, let it be observed, that it was prophesied of Christ by Isaiah, that "his *soul* should be made an offering
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for sin," for the sins of his people, ch. liii. 10. And we are told by our Apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews, ch. x. 10. "that believers are sanctified through the offering of the *body* of Christ once for all." Thus the atonement for guilty man, which the prophet ascribes to the pouring out of Christ's soul, is ascribed by the Apostle to the offering of the body of Christ; which can admit of no other solution but this, that, by an usual figure, a part being put for the whole, they both mean and speak of the same thing, i. e. of Christ himself, "who hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God," Ephes. v. 2. Whence it follows, that the broken body of Christ, to which the text calls our attention as an expiatory sacrifice, must mean his whole human nature, soul and body. And it is also to be remarked, that as both these constituent parts of the man were essential to the one sacrifice which he offered upon the cross, they were also partakers together of his sufferings through life, particularly in the garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, where he began to be sore amazed, and in an agony. And, O, how hot the conflict! "his body sweating as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground;" and his soul sorrowful, (as he expressed it himself), "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Such was the awful scene, and such the moving language of the man Christ Jesus, in the hearing of his disciples; not surely of his divine nature, which is incapable of agony and pain, but of his afflicted human soul.

Besides,

Besides, without a reasonable soul united to his body, he could not, properly, have been allied to our nature, nor have taken on him the seed of Abraham ; which, however, he is said to have done ; and which indeed became necessary for him to do. He could not otherwise, as a representative of men, have been qualified to stand in their place as Surety ; neither could he have expiated the sin of the soul, if he had not suffered in his own soul. And, on the other hand, it was no less necessary, that a body should have been prepared for him, as by this only he was capable of becoming a propitiatory sacrifice, by the suffering of death ; and by this too his sufferings were rendered visible to the whole intelligent creation, to angels and men, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was evidently set forth crucified. What has been said on this part of our argument, may be summed up in the words of the Apostle to the Hebrews, ch. ii. 17. “ That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, it behoved him to be made *like unto his brethren* in all things.”

By this view of Christ in the sacrament of the supper, as clothed with our nature in its lowest suffering state, it may also be intended to exhibit the amazing condescension of the eternal Son of God, in becoming a frail man, to be crucified in weakness : “ who, (as we read), Philip. ch. ii. 6. to 8.) though he was in the form of God, and
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thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." If you ask, Why did Christ assume this humble form ? and why in that form did he suffer and die ? we have the answer, Heb. ii. 14. " Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death."

— This leads to

Another and more important view our text gives of the object we are called to discern ; a view that spreads an awful glory around the weak, the despised body of a suffering Jesus : It is called, *the Lord's* body, the body of him who is emphatically styled *The Lord*. This high title which is exclusive of an equal, belongs to the one God, and is given to him only. So Jesus is designed the *one Lord*, and *Lord of all*. To which of the angels is this name given at any time ? Not to the highest Seraph ? No : they are all commanded to worship the Son as *their* Lord and God. The broken body of a crucified Jesus, represented by the sacramental bread, is the Lord's body ; not merely his property, as is the earth, and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein, Pf. xxiv. 1. ; but his body, by the most intimate and indissoluble union. Such interest as the soul of
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man has in his body, as an essential part of the human constitution, the same interest the Eternal Word hath in this body whereof my text speaks, as a part of himself, or as it enters into the constitution of his divine person; and hence his name is called *Immanuel*, or *God-man*. It is this constitution of the Mediator's person which gives the true interpretation of that amazing passage of scripture, — God purchased the church with his *own* blood, — his own personal blood, properly belonging to the human nature indeed, but justly called the blood of God, inasmuch as the man Jesus, whose blood was shed, was united personally to the everlasting God; an union that rendered his blood precious beyond conception; infinitely valuable, and efficacious to obtain the eternal redemption of innumerable souls.

This is the great object exhibited to our faith, and which faith discerns in the sacramental symbols, — “the Lord's body, — God manifested in the flesh,” — the Eternal Word clothed with the human nature, and in that nature wounded, broken, and bruised, and so offered up a real proper sacrifice for sin. This just view of it gives high importance, a grandeur and majesty, to the institution, though of mean appearance to the carnal eye. The natural man, who wants faith, and looks no farther than to the outside of the ordinance, sees no beauty, nor glory, nor importance, in it, for which, upon its own account,

he should desire it. Many, therefore, who now sit down at the Lord's table, would never appear there, were it not to please those with whom they may be connected in civil life, or to carry on their selfish designs to greater advantage, by preserving some character among the religious part of mankind; especially such as are members with them of the same church. When, therefore, merely in compliance with the customary national profession, they partake of the elements, and at the same time have no sense nor impression of the great object represented by them, they must necessarily wonder why men make so much ado about this ordinance, and are at such pains to prepare for it. But to them who believe, it is truly precious, important, and solemn; while in it they behold the divine glory of the only-begotten Son of God; the great God and their Saviour, made flesh, and made a curse for them, bearing their sins in his own body on the tree.

Faith's spiritual discernment of this great object, is what qualifies for communicating worthily and profitably; and without it, suppose one were ever so intelligent, and persuaded of the historical fact of Christ's crucifixion, whereof the ordinance is commemorative, he partakes unworthily, being devoid of true judgement, of affection, and devotion. The table of the Lord is contemptible to him, it is profaned, its spiritual fruit is disrelished and despised; insomuch that
what

what should have been for his welfare becomes a snare, and hurtful to his true interest. — Which leads me,

II. To consider the act of the believing mind in *discerning* the Lord's body.

It implies a supernatural faculty of the soul, which is a special gift from God, and is not dispensed to men promiscuously. It is not the natural privilege of any man ; nor is it acquired by the utmost exertion of reason. It is something superadded to our natural faculties, and peculiar to those that are enlightened from above, who are thereby enabled to conceive of divine things in a manner impossible to others. As some have a natural taste or discernment of propriety, of elegance and beauty, which, though it receives improvement by exercise, is not an acquired accomplishment, but a natural gift ; so this discernment of the Lord's body is a particular gift or quality of grace peculiar to a true believer : " For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." — Again,

This discernment differs greatly from our knowledge by reasoning. It is the province of Reason to infer one thing from another ; as, when the people saw the miracles of Christ, they thence concluded, " This is the prophet that should come." Reason also infers the existence of things, while we see not the objects themselves,

and feel little or nothing of their effects upon us ; as when one beholds the moon, and other planets, shining with a borrowed light from the sun, his reason concludes, that the sun certainly exists, though it be out of his sight, and he is not sensible of its warm refreshing beams. To discern is to perceive what is present to our view. It expresses knowledge by intuition, or looking on what is before us, rather than by deductions or inference. In viewing the Lord's body in the sacramental elements, the believer indeed reasons ; but all the reasoning required is so simple, that the unlearned is at no loss to comprehend it. " These signs (says he) are instituted for bringing a crucified Jesus to my remembrance ; and I do remember him." And in remembering him by the help of those external signs, the divine object signified by them, is, through faith, present to his mind ; and that in proportion as the Lord is pleased to bless the elements, and to manifest himself in the breaking of that bread. Whereas the man that remembers Christ in the sacrament as crucified, only by the exercise of his reason, and merely as an historical fact ; though he may, by a lively imagination, figure to himself a scene so tragical, as raises a violent commotion of the animal spirits ; yet the divine object exhibited to faith's view is hid from him. It enters not into his understanding nor heart ; and therefore he partakes of the elements ignorantly, in unbelief ; while

while the true believer sees in them Jesus Christ evidently set forth crucified before his eyes, to his humiliation, comfort, and joy.

It may not be unnecessary still to insist, that it is not a discernment by sense of a sensible object, but a spiritual discernment of a spiritual object, quite distinct from, and infinitely transcending in excellence what may be known by our senses, by seeing, by tasting, by handling. The sensible signs give occasion to the remembrance of the adorable object, which is of a quite different nature from them, and to be apprehended by a different faculty from eyes of flesh, i. e. by the spiritual eye of the new creature.

Papists, even by their absurd blasphemous doctrine of Christ's corporal presence in the host, acknowledge the necessity of attending to an object different from the bread. At the same time, by transubstantiating the bread into Christ's body, to be eaten in a natural way, they disallow the faculty of spiritual discernment, and of faith's feeding on an unseen Jesus; perverting both into what is merely sensible, and in a way that palpably contradicts scripture, reason, and sense. By keeping the divine object out of sight, they, agreeably to the corrupt heart of man, render faith's labour and exercise unnecessary for salvation; and so would lead the ignorant multitude to suppose it in the power of every man, in the natural way of eating, to partake of Christ's saving

ving benefits, though he is not there in a corporal, but a spiritual sense : so that, whatever else is pretended to be brought to view by the magic of consecration, can be no other than the idol of mens fancy, substituted in Christ's place. By what fascination could the world be brought so universally to swallow such an absurdity and abomination?—— Good cause have we in these happy isles, gratefully to bless God, that we are taught according to the pure truth of scripture, which directs us to view the symbols of bread and wine, as commemorative signs of the crucifixion of the Son of God in our nature ; and in partaking of them, to call him to mind, with trust in the atoning virtue of his death, for eternal redemption.

In amplification of what hath already been advanced, it will be proper to consider more particularly, *first*, What faith discerns in the Lord's broken body ; and, *secondly*, How the soul is affected by what it thus discerns.

First, As to what faith discerns in the Lord's body.

1. It sees the Eternal Word, (whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting), clothing himself with human nature, and coming into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh ; but in himself without sin, holy, harmless, and undefiled. It sees the only-begotten Son of God, appointed, qualified, and sent by the Father from
heaven

heaven to earth, for the redemption of a perishing world. It sees man, and more than man, the great God in and with man, by the wise contrivance of Heaven, representing, redeeming, and saving man.

Faith (which perceives something godlike in this great truth) sees it with certainty; "knowing assuredly that Jesus came forth from God, and that the Father did send him." It is peculiar to divine faith, to be infallibly persuaded of divine truth. The most rational natural man in the world, "being alienated from the life of God, because of the blindness of his heart," believes not with an infallible persuasion of the truth. Upon moral evidence, he is obliged to assent to it; but he is not assuredly persuaded of it in his heart: "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh." This is so contrary to the apprehensions of an unenlightened mind, that "his being believed on in the world," is reckoned part of that mystery, and what Christ himself tells us is hid from the natural man, however wise and prudent in other respects. Whence it appears, that no man can believe with the heart unto salvation, but by a divine faith of God's operation; or, to speak in the language of inspiration, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;" he cannot say it with such a firm unshaken faith, as to rely upon and trust in him.

Thus

Thus true faith, and true faith only, sees with certainty this important truth, That the Son of God is come in the flesh, upon the benevolent design of redeeming a guilty world, by laying down his life for them. He who thus believes, is born of God, is translated from darkness to light, and beholds the glory of Christ in human form, as the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The hearts of others are so enveloped in darkness, that they apprehend not this truth in its highly interesting reality, and can see no form or comeliness in Christ why he should be desired.

2. True faith sees this divine person, after he had finished a course of perfect obedience on earth, yielding his sacred body unto death, as a real propitiatory sacrifice for sin, in the room of fallen apostate man, offering himself unto God, through the Eternal Spirit, in the perfect exercise of all the graces of the Spirit, in the perfection of love to his Father, and to his people, and in the firmest unshaken trust in God, for support under his sufferings, for an honourable end of them, and for success to his great undertaking, in bringing many sons to glory. It was this voluntary offering up through the Eternal Spirit, of his humanity, personally united to his divinity, that rendered his sacrifice, what it appears to be to the eye of faith, of a sweet-smelling savour to the Most High, in which
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the truth and substance of all the legal shadows received their full accomplishment, and by which alone reconciliation could be made for iniquity. In this mysterious sacrifice, faith sees the awful glory of inflexible justice, the amiable displays of tender mercy, and the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, in reconciling the seeming opposite interests of those divine attributes with respect to guilty man, causing them to meet in perfect harmony, and maintaining at the same time the rights of both in their highest exercise, in punishing sin with tremendous severity, and saving the sinner with matchless grace and love.

3. Faith sees Jesus to be Lord even in his humiliation and abasement, in his agonies and sorrows. It sees him exerting the power of a God, "in bearing the curse of the law in his own body on the tree." This curse was the sting of his sufferings, which pierced his inmost soul;—the awful load, whence it became sorrowful, exceeding sorrowful, unto death. Who then but a God could have borne, without fainting, the dreadful weight? Had Christ been no more than a mere creature, possessing the strength of all creatures in one, he must have sunk under the infinite load. His victorious sufferings cry aloud, from the cross, to creation, "Behold the man, in extreme sufferings, still maintaining the dignity of the Son of God, the dignity of perfect innocence

and holiness, and confess him sustained by his eternal Godhead ! See him, in human nature, acting a part becoming a man so nearly allied to God ! lovely, infinitely lovely, in his life ! in death, like the setting sun, beaming ; if possible, in still brighter glory ! See him then finishing a course of the most painful obedience, in the perfection of meek resignation to the will of his Father, smiting and afflicting him in the day of his fierce anger ! — “ O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” See here a conquering God in a suffering man ! — Thus,

4. Faith sees the Lord’s broken body accomplishing the great purpose intended by it, the expiation of sin ; and calls to us, in the words of the Redeemer’s harbinger, “ Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” The Messiah, having been cut off for the sins of the people, hath finished transgression, and made reconciliation for iniquity. God having laid on him the sins of a whole elect world, he, by one offering, hath completed the atonement of them ; the certain effect of which is, that many heaven-born sons shall be brought to glory.

The great evidence of this (and which the Lord’s supper is designed to bring to view, as well as his death) is his resurrection from the dead, and his triumphant entrance into glory.

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The designation of the *Lord's body* given to the human nature of Christ crucified, suggests to us, that his body could not have continued under the power of death, but must have revived: "And he is risen indeed; for though he was crucified in weakness, he lives by the power of God." His voice, in the sacramental symbols, speaks thus in our ears: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell, and of death." Through death, he hath destroyed him that had the power of death; and for the suffering of death, he is crowned with glory and honour. He is raised to reign in the same nature that died, as Lord over all. This declares the efficacy of his sacrifice to raise to life those for whom it was offered. For men he died, and for men he rose again, in their name, and as their head. Hence the fullest assurance that they shall rise with him, and follow him to glory: "For now is Christ risen, and become the first-fruits of them who slept." "And since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead;" which expresses the propriety of mens deliverance from sin and death by one man, constituted their head, and satisfying the law in their place: "If, therefore, we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Such is the elevating encour-

agement presented to our view by the Lord's body. — I add,

Lastly, That from this view of the Lord's body, held forth in the sacramental symbols as the offering of the body of Jesus, a high-priest taken from among men, one may derive comfort to himself in particular : for no sooner are his eyes opened to behold Christ crucified, and his ears to hear the call, going along with this exhibition of him, to all the world, to every individual that claims kindred to the human nature, to look to this great sacrifice for redemption, than he sees his own right and title to trust to it ; and in trusting to it, sees ground for the most assured hope of pardon and eternal life. It is by blinding our minds, and hiding Christ from our view, that Satan keeps us from trusting our guilty souls to him, “ for redemption in his blood.” Were the vail taken from our hearts, to see him in the light of a propitiatory sacrifice, every one would confidently come under “ the refuge of his wings,” with the disciple's exclamation of particular trust, “ My Lord, and my God !”

To this appropriating act of faith, which brings Christ, and the benefits of his death, home to our own souls, we are called in a particular manner, in the sacrament of the supper, “ Take, eat ; this is my body, broken for you.” Warranted by this divine testimony, the testimony of Jesus himself, the believing communicant echoes
back

back with holy joy and confidence, "This is Christ's body, broken for me.—This is my beloved, and this is my friend;—who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Having thus, in several particulars, brought to view what faith discerns in the Lord's body, I next proceed to show, in the

Second place, How the soul is affected with what it thus discerns.

It is of importance to attend to the affections raised by faith's contemplation of Christ in his death: for by them it may be known surely, that he is truly seen; and by the want of them, it may as certainly be known, that he is not seen in the saving light of which we speak.

1. Faith's view of Christ in his death, raises wonder and admiration, which mingle with the exercise of all devout affections. See Luke, xxiv. 41. Faith is a marvellous light, unfolding amazing wonders to the believing mind. To one newly awaked from sleep, and coming out of darkness, it is an astonishing sight, to see the great God, who is said to humble himself when he beholds the things that are in heaven and in the earth, condescending so low as to be made flesh, that, by the energy of God in man, he might, agreeably to the divine law and constitution, save men. And yet here we see something still more astonishing: we see this God-man (whose humanity, on account of its union to God, challenges the profoundest respect from angels and men)

men) submitting to the greatest indignities, to die as the basest criminal, in the most ignominious manner, that, in satisfying the law for men, he might procure their escape from its curse.

And when thus beholding the wonderful condescending grace of the Saviour, we see the no less wonderful counsel of God, in devising this gracious plan of redemption, which exhibits mercy and justice in their utmost glory. — Here indeed is a mystery of grace and wisdom, astonishing to angels; and which so far exceeds the comprehension of the inhabitants of this world, that, though it comes recommended by the most unquestionable testimony of its truth, yet the believing of it, as above observed, enters into the great mystery of godliness. He who thus discerns the Lord's body sees in it this mystery; and in beholding it, is filled with the highest admiration. We may therefore conclude, without breach of charity, that he who, in partaking of the sacramental elements, has never had his wonder raised, in any degree, by what they represent, hath never seen the Lord's body. He hath not seen God, and God manifested in the flesh.

2. Faith's view of the Lord's body affects the soul with fear, fear of God's holy indignation against sin. In Christ crucified God appears a consuming fire. O what an infinite evil must sin be, that could not be expiated, nor the sinner saved, without shedding the precious blood of Christ!

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How tremendous the wrath kindled by it, and the inflexible severity of divine justice, that could not be pacified, but by the agonies, and sorrows, and death, of such a divine person! How dreadful the sight! the Son of God incarnate, suffering, bleeding, and dying, a victim for sin, upon the cross! This carries a more frightful alarm to the guilty minds of men, than the awful glory of God upon Mount Sinai, when he descended upon it in fire, in thunderings and lightnings, and with the sound of a trumpet. The language of it is, that God will by no means clear the guilty, without full satisfaction to all the demands of law and justice: so that, if we come short of an interest in the atoning death of Christ, “there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation.” If justice spared not the well-beloved and only-begotten Son of the Father, but smote him to death, when he became the substitute of sinners; will it, can it spare the guilty offenders? How can they escape everlasting destruction, if they reject the benefit of his sacrifice? In this view of the Lord's sacred body, broken for the sins of men, one is affected with fear of God's glorious holiness, and joins trembling with his mirth. — Thus,

3. As faith's view of the Lord's body raises holy awe, and dread of God's hot displeasure against sin, it at the same time inspires with joy and

and hope. When we see God and man united as one person in Christ, faith glories in him as such a surety, and such a high priest as our circumstances required, at whose birth the heavenly host, looking forward to his atonement, proclaimed “peace on earth, good-will towards men.” Again, faith’s view of an incarnate God, gives the well-grounded hope, that God and man, however far separated by sin, may again be brought nigh through the blood of Christ, and united together in the everlasting bonds of love and peace. Amazing grace! He who thus dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. As connected with this, when we farther see this divine person becoming obedient unto death, for the offences of men, and thereby abolishing the curse, and blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, (whereof God hath given the world the fullest assurance, in that he hath raised him from the dead); this effectually removes the fearful apprehensions of the curse of the law, and affords the joyful hope of certain deliverance from it, in consequence of our believing. It relieves of the pain of anxious uncertainty about a future state, and affords good hope beyond the grave, that “when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” In this hope, the sincere communicant rejoices in spirit, singing and
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making melody in his heart to the Lord. Need I add,

4. That faith's view of Christ in his death kindles love to God? In Christ's broken body, God, "who is rich in mercy," manifests that great, that unspeakable love wherewith he loved the world, in giving his Son to die for ungodly sinners. This love of God to men constrains love to him in return. But when, in feeling the distinguishing effects of his love, one can say, "God, who loved the world, hath loved *me* with an everlasting love; he hath, in some measure, shewed me his love and glory in Christ, and with loving kindness hath he drawn my heart to him;" O how doth love then rise in its heavenly ardour! This, I know, is consonant to the experience of some, I trust of many now hearing me, who, in discerning Christ's broken body, by a true and lively faith, as the appointed sacrifice for sin, for their sins in particular, have felt all the affectionate powers of the soul, swallowed up in God, crying out, with wonder and delight, "O the height and depth, the breadth and length, of the love of God in Christ; love which passeth knowledge! Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should partake of the children's bread!" But, alas! what vast numbers in partaking of the ordinance, mean only to commemorate the event of Christ's death as the matter of belief, without feeling any operation of

love and gratitude, any melting of heart towards God, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us ! If there are any such here present, their hard insensible souls bear witness, themselves being judges, that their eyes have not yet been opened to discern the Lord's body.

Some serious Christian may startle at this, and fear that he is not a living worthy communicant, because he finds his love far short of the measure of love due in return to the love of God. This is no uncommon complaint with the people of God : A complaint which sometimes rises from love to Christ ; and which they cannot deny when the question is put to them, as it was by our Lord to Peter, but must confess with Peter, “ Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee,” tho’ not as I ought, nor as thy love deserves. The more enlarged the Christian’s views are of the love of God in Christ Jesus, the more sensible he is of the deficiency of his own love. Even when he enjoys most of the comforts of God’s favour, and is in the best temper of mind, he complains of the coldness and imperfection of his love, that it ascends not with a perfectly pure flame. Hence the saints, being burdened, earnestly long, and pray, with weeping supplication, for the happy period when love shall be made perfect, and the whole man shall be one flame of love. —
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5. and lastly, Faith's view of the Lord's body awakens sorrow and mourning, — the sorrow and mourning, not of fear, but of love. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him." They shall feel sympathy with him, that dissolves in a soft flood of tears, when they see him expressing his wonderful love to a sinful ungrateful world, by suffering such extreme torments on their account ; — love stronger than death ; — love which led him to encounter a death tormenting as the collected pains of hell, a death so full of horror, as on its first appearance drew from him that moving complaint, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" as if the Son of God was put to a stand with the stern aspect of death envenomed with the sting of the curse. On sight of him, with the arrows of the Almighty sticking fast in his soul, the believer mourns for him : — "Ah, that the holy and innocent Lamb of God, he who never offended, but did always that which pleased his Father, it wounds my soul to think that he should be so smitten of God and afflicted. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ! With a suffering Jesus in my eye, can I but weep for him, as did the daughters of Jerusalem when he was led away to his cross ? Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow ! was ever love like unto his love, which led him to endure such unparalleled sorrow for enemies !"

When one reflects upon the unworthy returns he hath made to this love, he is affected with ingenuous shame and sorrow. In seeing the well-beloved Son of God put to grief for his sins, holy indignation rises in his breast against sin and against himself. O how willingly now, in compliance with the design of Christ's death, does he resign the whole body of sin to be destroyed! "Let not that accursed thing live in me, for which the Son of God, my Saviour, died."

Thus the true discernment of the Lord's body awakens to exercise all devout affections, and ever leaves upon the soul a sanctifying impression. It is powerful to draw the heart from sin, to raise its abhorrence of all "idols," to kindle its ardent love of holiness, and to influence it, with alacrity and spirit, to universal obedience. "Beholding the glory of the Lord, in this death, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory." And ever in proportion to our spiritual discernment of the Lord's body, shall be the melting of heart taken notice of, the keenness of our hatred at sin, and the ardour of our love to holiness.

They who sit down at the Lord's table without feeling any impression of this kind,—who partake of the elements without adoring wonder, without filial fear, without joy, without love, without sorrow, without any painful feeling of sin, without indignation against it, and a vehement de-
fire

fire of holiness, are certainly blind to the nature of the ordinance. They receive no benefit by it, but rather great prejudice to their souls; they eat and drink judgement to themselves.

I shall now conclude with a short improvement of the subject. — And,

From what has been discoursed, agreeably, I hope, to truth, we see, that eating of the Lord's supper is a serious and solemn action, which draws after it very important consequences, greatly to our profit or to our prejudice. He must think so who studies to enter into the spirit of things, and who knows he has more to find than the mere knowledge of the doctrines, even the divine object itself, to which the doctrines are designed to lead us. He who regards this ordinance only as a respectable ceremony, an ordinary matter, of easy comprehension, and of easy performance, must be little acquainted with God, with himself, and with every thing of a sacred, spiritual nature. Partaking of the Lord's supper has the form of signing, sealing, and ratifying a mutual engagement between God and our souls, II. xlv. 5. It is certainly the most serious transaction with God, for eternity, that can employ the mind of man; a transaction which requires a capacity quite above what is natural to any man, a capacity of seeing and believing what is invisible to the eye of sense, and can be known
only

only by the revelation of the Spirit. I say not this to discourage any serious persons who have a great desire after the ordinance, and the glorious object it represents, a crucified Jesus; but who, sensible of its great solemnity, and questioning their fitness for it, fear to approach. Those who are sincere, but of fearful hearts, I would encourage and strengthen. I mean only to deter the ignorant and unbelieving, the dissolute and profane, the hypocrite, or such as regard iniquity in their heart, from meddling with these sacred symbols. O be not too rash to approach the Lord's table; it will be to your hurt. Neither be easy in the neglect of the duty; set about preparing for it with all diligence and speed. Look seriously into the state of your souls. "Put off the old man, put on the new man," Christ Jesus. Be a Christian first, and then be a communicant. Believe *now*, as you are called, in the Lord Jesus, that you may have redemption through his blood, and peace with God. A delay in this matter is extremely dangerous, as you know not what a day or an hour may bring forth. "What then your hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." And now let what has been above represented, agreeably to the doctrine of the text, be deeply impressed upon your mind; I mean, that in order to a due participation of the Lord's supper, communicants

nicants must have that spiritual discernment, which, through the symbols of bread and wine, beholds the man Christ Jesus, “in his died garments, glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength, mighty to save,” till, warmed with a live coal from this altar, they love him, adore him, trust and rejoice in him. Such saying discoveries of the Lord of glory, and Redeemer of mankind, are, I may venture to affirm, a supernatural gift, which you must humbly ask from him, yea, must in some measure obtain, and feel its happy effects in your heart; otherwise you cannot with profit, or with safety, partake of the ordinance.

I cannot conclude without observing, that the Apostle, in this chapter, after taking notice of the unhappy divisions and disorders which then rent the church of Corinth, so contrary to this feast of love, represents many of them as altogether disqualified from partaking of it, by their ignorance and intemperance. Being devoid of saving knowledge, the eye of faith by which only Christ crucified can be spiritually discerned in the sacrament, “they did eat and drink unworthily,” as you have heard, “not discerning the Lord's body;” and by their intemperance, and inordinate indulgence to appetite, particularly to the lust of drunkenness, were a scandal to their holy profession, and in presuming to assemble for eating the Lord's supper, “came together, not for the better,
but

but for the worse ;” and, what is still more alarming, “ came together unto condemnation.” Surely it needs no argument to shew, that such ignorant voluptuous libertines, who, renouncing all pretensions to the Christian name and character, have become the votaries of Satan, cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils, cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table and of the table of devils. The exhortation to those profane persons runs on this wise, “ Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, purify your hearts, ye double-minded ; be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, for all your abominations ; believe with the heart unto righteousness : then may you come to the Lord’s table, and humbly hope to be sealed by the Spirit unto the day of redemption.”

One other remark I must add, by way of caution, that we must beware of imagining, from the character and conduct just mentioned, which the apostle here gives of the Corinthians, as the unhappy cause of their eating and drinking unworthily at the sacramental supper ; — we must, I say, beware of imagining from thence, that nothing but gross ignorance, or open vice, forbid an approach to the table of the Lord.

It appears, from what the same apostle teaches in this epistle, and elsewhere, and indeed from the nature of the ordinance itself, in what light soever we consider it, that not only *clean hands*, temperance,

perance, and sobriety, but a *pure heart*, a heart sanctified by divine grace, is required, by the command of Heaven, in all those who would come to that holy table, so as "to receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of their salvation." What Christ said to Peter, he says to all his disciples, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." If no washing by Christ, then no part, no lot, no interest in Christ. In his sermon on the mount, he pronounces "the pure in heart blessed, because they shall see God;" intimating, that without such inward purity they cannot see God. To the same purpose speak all the prophets, and all the apostles, that without holiness *no man*, whatever be his qualifications in other respects, can *see* or enjoy *God*, either in his kingdom of grace here, or in his kingdom of glory hereafter. What these inspired writers say unto one, they say unto all, "Wash ye, make ye clean; be ye saved with the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."—"Yield yourselves unto the Lord," and then enter into his sanctuary, which he has consecrated for his sanctified ones. "Wash your hands in innocency, and so compass his holy altar." Incline your ear, and come unto him. Come to his holy table, to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, the feast of fat things prepared for you; and there "eat ye that which is good. Hear, and your

soul shall live ; and God will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David." Amen, so be it.

And may the grace and power of Jehovah be for ever glorified in the salvation of all within these walls, through Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be glory and dominion, world without end. *Amen, and Amen.*

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